IDYLS AND LEGENDS OF INVERBURN

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By ROBERT BUCHANAN

AUTHOR OF "UNDERTONES"



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WILLIE BAIRD.

'An old man's tale, a tale for men grey hair'd,
Who wear, thro' second childhood, to the Lord."

'Tis two-and-thirty summers since I came
To school the village lads of Inverburn.

My father was a shepherd old and poor,
Who, dwelling 'mong the clouds on norland hills,
His tartan plaidie on, and by his side
His sheep-dog running, redden'd with the winds
That whistle saltly south from Polar seas:
I follow'd in his footsteps when a boy,
And knew by heart the mountains round our home;
But when I went to Edinglass, to learn
At college there, I look'd about the place,
And heard the murmur of the busy streets

Around me, in a dream;—and only saw
The clouds that snow around the mountain-tops,
The mists that chase the phantom of the moon
In lonely mountain tarns,—and heard the while,
Not footsteps sounding hollow to and fro,
But winds sough-soughing thro' the woods of pine.
Time pass'd; and day by day those sights and sounds
Grew fainter,—till they troubled me no more.

O Willie, Willie, are you sleeping sound?
And can you feel the stone that I have placed
Yonder above you? Are you dead, my doo?
Or did you see the shining Hand that parts
The clouds above, and becks the bonnie birds,
Until they wing away, and human eyes,
That watch them till they vanish in the blue,
Droop and grow tearful? Ay, I ken, I ken,
I'm talking folly, but I loved the child!
He was the bravest scholar in the school!
He came to teach the very dominie—
Me, with my lyart locks and sleepy heart!

O well I mind the day his mother brought

Her tiny trembling tot with yellow hair,
Her tiny poor-clad tot six summers old,
And left him seated lonely on a form
Before my desk. He neither wept nor gloom'd;
But waited silently, with shoeless feet
Swinging above the floor; in wonder eyed
The maps upon the walls, the big black board,
The slates and books and copies, and my own
Grey hose and clumpy boots; last, fixing gaze
Upon a monster spider's web that fill'd
One corner of the whitewash'd ceiling, watch'd
The speckled traitor jump and jink about,
Till he forgot my unfamiliar eyes,
Weary and strange and old. "Come here, my bairn!"
And timid as a lamb he seddled up.
"What do they call ye?" "Willie," coo'd the wean,
Up-peeping slyly, scraping with his feet.
I put my hand upon his yellow hair,
And cheer'd him kindly. Then I bade him lift
The small black bell that stands behind the door
And ring the shouting laddies from their play.
"Run, Willie!" And he ran, and eyed the bell,
Stoop'd o'er it, seem'd afraid that it would bite,

Then grasp'd it firm, and as it jingled gave
A timid cry—next laugh'd to hear the sound—
And ran full merry to the door and rang,
And rang, and rang, while lights of music lit
His pallid cheek, till, shouting, panting hard,
In ran the big rough laddies from their play.

Then rapping sharply on the desk I drove
The laddies to their seats, and beckon'd up
The stranger—smiling, bade him seat himself
And hearken to the rest. Two weary hours
Buzz-buzz, boom-boom, went on the noise of school,
While Willie sat and listen'd open-mouth'd;
Till school was over, and the big and small
Flew home in flocks. But Willie stay'd behind.
I beckon'd to the mannock with a smile,
And took him on my knee and crack'd and talk'd.

First, he was timid; next, grew bashful; next,
He warm'd and told me stories of his home,
His father, mother, sisters, brothers, all;
And how, when strong and big, he meant to buy
A gig to drive his father to the kirk;

And how he long'd to be a dominie:
Such simple prattle as I plainly see
You smile at. But to little children God
Has given wisdom and mysterious power
Which beat the mathematics. *Quærere*
Verum in sylvis Academi, Sir,
Is meet for men who can afford to dwell
For ever in a garden, reading books
Of morals and the logic. Good and well!
Give me such tiny truths as only bloom
Like red-tipt gowans at the hallanstone,
Or kindle softly, flashing bright at times,
In fuffing cottage fires!

The laddie still
Was seated on my knee, when at the door
We heard a scrape-scrape-scraping: Willie prick'd
His ears and listen'd, then he clapt his hands—
"Hey! Donald, Donald, Donald!" [See! the rogue
Looks up and blinks his eyes—he knows his name!]
"Hey, Donald, Donald!" Willie cried. At that
I saw beneath me, at the door, a Dog—
The very collie dozing at your feet,

His nose between his paws, his eyes half closed.
At sight of Willie, with a joyful bark
He leapt and gamboll'd, eyeing me the while
In queer suspicion; and the mannock peep'd
Into my face, while patting Donald's back -
"It's Donald! he has come to take me home!"

An old man's tale, a tale for men grey-hair'd,
Who wear, thro' second childhood, to the grave!
I'll hasten on. Thenceforward Willie came
Daily to school, and daily to the door
Came Donald trotting; and they homeward went
Together—Willie walking slow but sure,
And Donald trotting sagely by his side.
[Ay, Donald, he is dead! be still, old man!]

What link existed, human or divine,
Between the tiny tot six summers old,
And yonder life of mine upon the hills
Among the mists and storms? 'Tis strange, 'tis strange
But when I look'd on Willie's face, it seem'd
That I had known it in some beauteous life
That I had left behind me in the north.

This fancy grew and grew, till oft I sat—
The buzzing school around me—and would seem
To be among the mists, the tracks of rain,
Nearing the hueless silence of the snow.
Slowly and surely I began to feel
That I was all alone in all the world,
And that my mother and my father slept
Far, far away, in some forgotten kirk—
Remember'd but in dreams. Alone at nights,
I read my Bible more and Euclid less.
For, mind you, like my betters, I had been
Half scoffer, half believer; on the whole,
I thought the life beyond a useless dream,
Best left alone, and shut my eyes to themes
That puzzled mathematics. But at last,
When Willie Baird and I grew friends, and thoughts
Came to me from beyond my father's grave,
I found 'twas pleasant late at e'en to read
My Bible—haply, only just to pick
Some easy chapter for my pet to learn—
Yet night by night my soul was guided on
Like a blind man some angel hand convoys.

I cannot frame in speech the thoughts that fill'd
This grey old brow, the feelings dim and warm
That soothed the throbbings of this weary heart!
But when I placed my hand on Willie's head,
Warm sunshine tingled from the yellow hair
Thro' trembling fingers to my blood within;
And when I look'd in Willie's stainless eyes
I saw the empty ether floating grey
O'er shadowy mountains murmuring low with winds;
And often when, in his old-fashion'd way,
He question'd me, I seem'd to hear a voice
From far away, that mingled with the cries
Haunting the regions where the round red sun
Is all alone with God among the snow.

Who made the stars? and if within his hand
He caught and held one, would his fingers burn?
If I, the grey-hair'd dominie, was dug
From out a cabbage garden such as he
Was found in? if, when bigger, he would wear
Grey homespun hose and clumsy boots like mine,
And have a house to dwell in all alone?
Thus would he question, seated on my knee,

While Donald (wheesht, old man!) stretch'd lyart limbs
Under my chair, contented. Open-mouth'd
He hearken'd to the tales I loved to tell
About Sir William Wallace and the Bruce,
And the sweet lady on the Scottish throne,
Whose crown was colder than a band of ice,
Yet seem'd a sunny crown whene'er she smiled;
With many tales of genii, giants, dwarfs,
And little folk that play at jing-a-ring
On beds of harebells 'neath the silver moon;
Stories and rhymes and songs of Wonder-land:
How Tammas Ercildoune in Elfland dwelt,
How Galloway's mermaid comb'd her golden hair,
How Tammas Thumb stuck in the spider's web,
And fought and fought, a needle for his sword,
Dyeing his weapon in the crimson blood
Of the foul traitor with the poison'd fangs!

And when we read the Holy Book, the child
Would think and think o'er parts he loved the best;
The draught of fish, the Child that sat so wise
In the great Temple, Herod's cruel law
To slay the weans, or—oftenest of all—

The crucifixion of the Good Kind Man
Who loved the weans and was a wean himself.
He speir'd of death; and were the sleepers cold
Down in the dark wet earth? and was it God
That put the grass and flowers in the kirk-yard?
What kind of dwelling-place was heaven above?
And was it full of flowers? and were there schools
And dominies there? and was it far away?
Then, with a look that made your eyes grow dim,
Clasping his wee white hands round Donald's neck,
"Do doggies gang to heaven?" he would ask;
"Would Donald gang?" and keek'd in Donald's face
While Donald blink'd with meditative gaze,
As if he knew full brawly what we said,
And ponder'd o'er it, wiser far than we.
But how I answer'd, how explain'd these themes
I know not. Oft I could not speak at all.
Yet every question made me think of things
Forgotten, puzzled so, and when I strove
To reason puzzled me so much the more,
That, flinging logic to the winds, I went
Straight onward to the mark in Willie's way,
Took most for granted, laid down premises

Of Faith, imagined, gave my wit the reins,
And oft on nights at e'en, to my surprise,
Felt palpably an angel's glowing face
Glimmering down upon me, while mine eyes
Dimm'd their old orbs with tears that came unbid
To bear the glory of the light they saw.

So summer pass'd. Yon chestnut at the door
Scatter'd its burnish'd leaves and made a sound
Of wind among its branches. Every day
Came Willie, seldom going home again
Till near the sunset: wet or dry he came:
Oft in the rainy weather carrying
A big umbrella, under which he walk'd—
A little fairy in a parachute,
Blown hither, thither, at the wind's wild will.
Pleased was my heart to see his pallid cheeks
Were gathering rosy-posies, that his eyes
Were softer and less sad. Then, with a gust,
Old Winter tumbled shrieking from the hills,
His white hair blowing in the wind.

The house

Where Willie's mother lives is scarce a mile
From yonder hallan, if you take a cut
Before you reach the village, crossing o'er
Green meadows till you reach the road again;
But he who thither goes along the road
Loses a reaper's mile. The summer long
Wee Willie came and went across the fields:
He loved the smell of flowers and grass, the sight
Of cows and sheep, the changing stalks of wheat,
And he was weak and small. When winter came,
Still caring not a straw for wind or rain
Came Willie and the collie; till by night
Down fell the snow, and fell three nights and days,
Then ceased. The ground was white and ankle-deep;
The window of the school was threaded o'er
With flowers of hueless ice—Frost's unseen hands
Prick'd you from head to foot with tinging heat
The shouting urchins, yonder on the green,
Play'd snowballs. In the school a cheery fire
Was kindled every day, and every day
When Willie came he had the warmest seat,
And every day old Donald, punctual, came
To join us, after labour, in the lowe.

Fly to the city, Spirit of the Spring,
Breathe softly on the eyes of those who read.
And make a gentle picture of the scene
Wherein these men and women come and go:
The clachan with its humming sound of looms,
The quaint old gables, roofs of turf and thatch,
The glimmering spire that peeps above the firs,
The waggons in the lanes, the waterfall
With cool sound plunging in its wood-nest wild,
The stream whose soft blue arms encircle all,—
And in the background heathery norland hills,
Hued like the azure of the dew-berrie,
And mingling with the regions of the Rain!

Three days and nights the snow had mistily fall'n.
It lay long miles along the country-side,
White, awful, silent. In the keen cold air
There was a hush, a sleepless silentness,
And mid it all, upraising eyes, you felt
God's breath upon your face; and in your blood,
Though you were cold to touch, was flaming fire,
Such as within the bowels of the earth
Burnt at the bones of ice, and wreath'd them round
With grass ungrown.

One day in school I saw,
Through threaded window-panes, soft, snowy flakes
Swim with unquiet motion, mistily, slowly,
At intervals; but when the boys were gone,
And in ran Donald with a dripping nose,
The air was clear and grey as glass. An hour
Sat Willie, Donald, and myself around
The murmuring fire, and then with tender hand
I wrapt a comforter round Willie's throat,
Button'd his coat around him close and warm,
And off he ran with Donald, happy-eyed
And merry, leaving fairy prints of feet

Behind him on the snow. I watch'd them fade
Round the white curve, and, turning with a sigh,
Came in to sort the room and smoke a pipe
Before the fire. Here, dreamingly and alone,
I sat and smoked, and in the fire saw clear
The norland mountains, white and cold with snow
That crumbled silently, and moved, and changed,—
When suddenly the air grew sick and dark,
And from the distance came a hollow sound,
A murmur like the moan of far-off seas.

I started to my feet, look'd out, and knew
The winter wind was whistling from the clouds
To lash the snow-clothed plain, and to myself
I prophesied a storm before the night.
Then with an icy pain, an eldritch gleam,
I thought of Willie; but I cheer'd my heart,
"He's home, and with his mother, long ere this!"
While thus I stood the hollow murmur grew
Deeper, the wold grew darker, and the snow
Rush'd downward, whirling in a shadowy mist.
I walk'd to yonder door and open'd it,
Whirr! the wind swung it from me with a clang,

And in upon me with an iron-like crash
Swoop'd in the drift. With pinch'd sharp face I gazed
Out on the storm! Dark, dark was all! A mist,
A blinding, whirling mist, of chilly snow,
The falling and the driven; for the wind
Swept round and round in clouds upon the earth,
And birm'd the deathly drift aloft with moans,
Till all was swooning darkness. Far above
A voice was shrieking, like a human cry.

I closed the door, and turn'd me to the fire,
With something on my heart—a load—a sense
Of an impending pain. Down the broad lum
Came melting flakes that hiss'd upon the coal;
Under my eyelids blew the blinding smoke,
And for a time I sat like one bewitch'd,
Still as a stone. The lonely room grew dark,
The flickering fire threw phantoms of the snow
Along the floor and on the walls around;
The melancholy ticking of the clock
Was like the beating of my heart. But, hush!
Above the moaning of the wind I heard
A sudden scraping at the door; my heart

Stood still and listen'd; and with that there rose
An awsome howl, shrill as a dying screech,
And scrape-scrape-scrape, the sound beyond the door!
I could not think—I could not breathe—a dark,
Awful foreboding gript me like a hand,
As opening the door I gazed straight out,
Saw nothing, till I felt against my knees
Something that moved and heard a moaning sound—
Then, panting, moaning, o'er the threshold leapt
Donald the dog, alone, and white with snow.

Down, Donald! down, old man! Sir, look at him!
I swear he knows the meaning of my words,
And tho' he cannot speak, his heart is full!
See now! see now! he puts his cold black nose
Into my palm and whines! he knows, he knows!
Would speak, and cannot, but he minds that night!

The terror of my heart seem'd choking me:
Dumbly I stared and wildly at the dog,
Who gazed into my face and whined and moan'd,
Leap'd at the door, then touched me with his paws,
And lastly, gript my coat between his teeth,

And pull'd and pull'd—whiles growling, whining whiles—
Till fairly madden'd, in bewilder'd fear,
I let him drag me through the banging door
Out to the whirling storm. Bareheaded, wild,
The wind and snow-drift beating on my face
Blowing me hither, thither, with the dog,
I dash'd along the road. What follow'd seem'd
An eerie, eerie dream!—a world of snow,
A sky of wind, a whirling howling mist
Which swam around with hundred sickly eyes;
And Donald dragging, dragging, beaten, bruised,
Leading me on to something that I fear'd—
An awful something, and I knew not what!
On, on, and farther on, and still the snow
Whirling, the tempest moaning! Then I mind
Of groping, groping in the shadowy light,
And Donald by me burrowing with his nose
And whining. Next a darkness, blank and deep!
But then I mind of tearing thro' the storm,
Stumbling and tripping, blind and deaf and dumb,
And holding to my heart an icy load
I clutch'd with freezing fingers. Far away—
It seem'd long miles on miles away—I saw

A yellow light—unto that light I tore—
And last, remember opening a door
And falling, dazzled by a blinding gleam
Of human faces and a flaming fire,
And with a crash of voices in my ears
Fading away into a world of snow.

When I awaken'd to myself, I lay
In my own bed at home. I started up
As from an evil dream and look'd around,
And to my side came one, a neighbour's wife,
Mother to two young lads I taught in school.
With hollow, hollow voice I question'd her,
And soon knew all: how a long night had pass'd
Since, with a lifeless laddie in my arms,
I stumbled horror-stricken, swooning, wild
Into a ploughman's cottage: at my side,
My coat between his teeth, a dog; and how
Senseless and cold I fell. Thence, when the storm
Had pass'd away, they bore me to my home.
I listen'd dumbly, catching at the sense;
But when the woman mention'd Willie's name,
And I was fear'd to phrase the thought that rose,

She saw the question in my tearless eyes
And told me—he was dead.

'Twould weary you
To tell the thoughts, the fancies, and the dreams
That weigh'd upon me, ere I rose in bed,
But little harm'd, and sent the wife away,
Rose, slowly drest, took up my staff and went
To Willie's mother's cottage. As I walk'd
Though all the air was calm and cold and still,
The blowing wind and dazzled snow were yet
Around about. I was bewilder'd like!
Ere I had time to think I found myself
Beside a truckle bed, and at my side
A weeping woman. And I clench'd my hands,
And look'd on Willie, who had gone to sleep.

In death-gown white, lay Willie fast asleep,
His blue eyes closed, his tiny fingers clench'd,
His lips apart a wee as if he breathed,
His yellow hair kaim'd back, and on his face
A smile—yet not a smile—a dim pale light
Such as the Snow keeps in its own soft wings.

Ay, he had gone to sleep, and he was sound!
And by the bed lay Donald watching still,
And when I look'd, he whined, but did not move.

I turn'd in silence, with my nails stuck deep
In my clench'd palms; but in my heart of hearts
I pray'd to God. In Willie's mother's face
There was a cold and silent bitterness—
I saw it plain, but saw it in a dream,
And cared not. So I went my way, as grim
As one who holds his breath to slay himself.
What follow'd that is vague as was the rest:
A winter day, a landscape hush'd in snow,
A weary wind, a horrid whiteness borne
On a man's shoulder, shapes in black, o'er all
The solemn clanging of an iron bell,
And lastly me and Donald standing both
Beside a tiny mound of fresh-heap'd earth,
And while around the snow began to fall
Mistily, softly, thro' the icy air,
Looking at one another, dumb and cold.

And Willie's dead!—that's all I comprehend—

Ay, bonnie Willie Baird has gone before:
The school, the tempest, and the eerie pain,
Seem but a dream,—and I am weary like.
I begg'd old Donald hard—they gave him me—
And we have lived together in this house
Long years with no companions. There's no need
Of speech between us. Here we dumbly bide,
But know each other's sorrow,—and we both
Feel weary. When the nights are long and cold,
And snow is falling as it falleth now,
And wintry winds are moaning, here I dream
Of Willie and the unfamiliar life
I left behind me on the norland hills!
"Do doggies gang to heaven?" Willie ask'd;
And ah! what Solomon of modern days
Can answer that? Yet here at nights I sit,
Reading the Book, with Donald at my side;
And stooping, with the Book upon my knee,
I sometimes gaze in Donald's patient eyes—
So sad, so human, though he cannot speak—
And think he knows that Willie is at peace,
Far far away beyond the norland hills,
Beyond the silence of the untrodden snow.

LORD RONALD'S WIFE

I.

Last night I toss'd upon my bed,
Because I knew that she was dead:
The curtains were white, the pane was blue,
The moon peep'd through,
And its eye was red—
"I would that my love were awake!" I said.

II.

Then I rose and the lamp of silver lit,
And over the rushes lightly stept,
Crept to the door and open'd it,
And enter'd the room where my lady slept;
And the censer threw a glamour grey
Over the bed on which she lay,

And sparkled on her golden hair,
Smiled on her lip and melted there,
And I shudder'd because she look'd so fair;—
For the curtains were white, and the pane was blue,
And the moon look'd through,
And its eye was red:
"I will hold her hand, and think," I said.

III.

And at first I could not think at all,
Because her hand was so thin and cold;
The grey light flicker'd along the wall,
And I seem'd to be growing old;
I look'd in her face and could not weep,
I hated the sound of mine own deep breath,
Lest it should startle her from the sleep
That seem'd too sweet and mild for death.
I heard the far-off clock intone
So slowly, so slowly—
Afar across the courts of stone,
The black hound shook his chain with a moan,
As the village clock chimed slowly, slowly,
slowly.

I pray'd that she might rise in bed,
And smile and say one little word,
"I long to see her eyes!" I said . .
I should have shriek'd if she had stirr'd.

IV.

I never sinn'd against thee, Sweet!
And yet last night, when none could see . .
I know not . . but from head to feet,
I seem'd one scar of infamy:
Perhaps because the fingers light
I held had grown so worn and white,
Perhaps because you look'd so fair,
With the thin grey light on your golden hair.

V.

You were warm, and I was cold,
Yet you loved me, little one, I knew—
I could not trifle—I was old—
I was wiser, carefuller, than you;
I liked my horse, I liked my hound,
I liked to hear the trumpet sound,
Over my wine I liked to chat,

But soberly, for I had mind:
You wanted that, and only that,
You were as light as is the wind.
At times, I know, it fretted me—
I chid thee mildly now and then—
No fault of mine—no blame to thee—
Women are women, men are men.
At first you smiled to see me frown,
And laughing leapt upon my knee,
And kiss'd the chiding shadow down,
And smooth'd my great beard merrily;
But then a change came o'er you, Sweet!
You walk'd about with pensive head;
You tried to read, and as you read
Patted your small impatient feet:—
"She is wiser now!" I smiling said . .
And ere I doubted—you were dead.

VI.

All this came back upon my brain
While I sat alone at your white bedside,
And I remember'd in my pain
Those words you spoke before you died—

For around my neck your arms you flung,
 And smiled so sweet though death was near—
"I was so foolish and so young!
 And yet I loved thee!—kiss me, dear!"
I put aside your golden hair,
 And kiss'd you, and you went to sleep;
And when I saw that death was there,
 My grief was cold, I could not weep;
And late last night, when you were dead,
I did not weep beside your bed,
For the curtains were white, and the pane was blue,
 And the moon look'd through,
 And its eye was red—
"How coldly she lies!" I said.

VII.

Then loud, so loud, before I knew,
The grey and black cock scream'd and crew,
And I heard the far-off bells intone
 So slowly, so slowly,
The black hound bark'd, and I rose with a groan,
 As the village bells chimed slowly, slowly,
 slowly.

I dropp'd the hand so cold and thin,
  I gazed, and your face seem'd still and wise,
And I saw the damp dull dawn stare in
  Like a dim drown'd face with oozy eyes;
And I open'd the lattice quietly,
And the cold wet air came in on me,
And I pluck'd two roses with fingers chill
From the roses that grew at your window-sill,
I pluck'd two roses, a white and a red,
Stole again to the side of your bed,
Raised the edge of your winding fold,
  Dropp'd the roses upon your breast,
Cover'd them up in the balmy cold,
  That none might know—and there they rest!
And out at the castle-gate I crept
Into the woods, and then . . I wept!
But to-day they carried you from here,
  And I follow'd your coffin with tearless cheek—
They knew not about the roses, dear!—
  I would not have them think me weak.

VIII.

And I am weary on my bed

Because I know you are cold and dead;
And I see you lie in darkness, Sweet!
With the roses under your winding-sheet;
The days and nights are dreary and cold,
And I am foolish, and weak, and old.

POET ANDREW.

O Loom, that loud art murmuring
What doth he hear thee say or sing
Thou hummest o'er the dead one's songs,
He cannot choose but hark,
His heart with tearful rapture throngs,
But all his face grows dark.

O cottage Fire, that burnest bright,
What pictures sees he in thy light?
A city's smoke, a white white face,
Phantoms that fade and die,
And last, the lonely burial-place
On the windy hill hard by.

'Tis near a year since Andrew went to sleep—
A winter and a summer. Yonder bed
Is where the boy was born, and where he died,
And yonder o'er the lowland is his grave:
The nook of grass and gowans where in thought
I found you standing at the set o' sun . .
The Lord content us—'tis a weary world.

These five-and-twenty years I've wrought and wrought
In this same dwelling ;—hearken ! you can hear
The looms that whuzzle-whazzle ben the house,
Where Jean and Mysie, lassies in their teens,
And Jamie, and a neighbour's son beside,
Work late and early. Andrew who is dead
Was our first-born ; and when he crying came,
With beaded een and pale old-farrant face,
Out of the darkness, Mysie and mysel'
Were young and heartsome ; and his smile, be sure,
Made daily toil the sweeter. Hey, his kiss
Put honey in the very porridge-pot !
His smile strung threads of sunshine on the loom !
And when he hung around his mother's neck,
He deck'd her out in jewels and in gold
That even ladies envied ! . . Weel ! . . in time
Came other children, newer gems and gold,
And Andrew quitted Mysie's breast for mine.
So years roll'd on, like bobbins on a loom ;
And Mysie and mysel' had work to do,
And Andrew took his turn among the rest,
No sweeter, dearer ; till, one Sabbath day,
When Andrew was a curly-pated tot

Of sunny summers six, I had a crack
With Mister Mucklewraith the Minister,
Who put his kindly hand on Andrew's head,
Call'd him a clever wean, a bonnie wean,
Clever at learning, while the mannikin
Blush'd red as any rose, and peeping up
Went twinkle-twinkle with his round black een;
And then, while Andrew laugh'd and ran awa',
The Minister went deeper in his praise,
And prophesied he would become in time
A man of mark. This set me thinking, sir,
And watching,—and the mannock puzzled me.

Would sit for hours upon a stool and draw
Droll faces on the slate, while other lads
Were shouting at their play; dumbly would lie
Beside the Lintock, sailing, piloting,
Navies of docken-leaves a summer day;
Had learn'd the hymns of Doctor Watts by heart
And as for old Scots songs, could lilt them a'—
From Yarrow Braes to Bonnie Bessie Lee—
And where he learn'd them, only Heaven knew;
And oft, altho' he feared to sleep his lane,

Would cowrie at the threshold in a storm
To watch the lightning,—as a birdie sits,
With fluttering fearsome heart and dripping wings,
Among the branches. Once, I mind it weel,
In came he, running, with a bloody nose,
Part tears, part pleasure, to his fluttering heart
Holding a callow mavis golden-bill'd,
The thin white film of death across its een,
And told us, sobbing, how a neighbour's son
Harried the birdie's nest, and how by chance
He came upon the thief beside the burn
Throwing the birdies in to see them swim,
And how he fought him, till he yielded up
This one, the one remaining of the nest;—
And "O the birdie 's dying!" sobb'd he sore,
"The bonnie birdie 's dying!"—till it died;
And Andrew dug a grave behind the house,
Buried his dead, and cover'd it with earth,
And cut, to mark the grave, a grassy turf
Where blew a bunch of gowans. After that,
I thought and thought, and thick as bees the thoughts
Buzz'd to the whuzzle-whazzling of the loom—
I could make naething of the mannikin!

But by-and-by, when Hope was making hay,
And web-work rose, I settled it and said
To the good wife, "Tis plain that yonder lad
Will never take to weaving—and at school
They say he beats the rest at all his tasks
Save figures only: I have settled it:
Andrew shall be a minister—a pride
And comfort to us, Mysie, in our age:
He shall to college in a year or twa
(If fortune smiles as now) at Edinglass."
You guess the wife open'd her een, cried "Foosh!"
And call'd the plan a silly senseless dream,
A hopeless, useless castle in the air;
But ere the night was out, I talk'd her o'er,
And here she sat, her hands upon her knees,
Glow'ring and heark'ning, as I conjured up,
Amid the fog and reek of Edinglass
Life's peaceful gloaming and a godly fame.
So it was broach'd, and after many cracks
With Mister Mucklewraith, we plann'd it a',
And day by day we laid a penny by
To give the lad when he should quit the bield.

And years wore on; and year on year was cheer'd
By thoughts of Andrew, drest in decent black,
Throned in a Pulpit, preaching out the Word,
A house his own, and all the country-side
To touch their bonnets to him. Weel, the lad
Grew up among us, and at seventeen
His hands were genty white, and he was tall,
And slim, and narrow-shoulder'd: pale of face,
Silent, and bashful. Then we first began
To feel how muckle more he knew than we,
To eye his knowledge in a kind of fear,
As folk might look upon a crouching beast,
Bonnie, but like enough to rise and bite.
Up came the cloud between us silly folk
And the young lad that sat among his Books
Amid the silence of the night; and oft
It pain'd us sore to fancy he would learn
Enough to make him look with shame and scorn
On this old dwelling. 'Twas his *manner*, sir!
He seldom lookt his father in the face,
And when he walkt about the dwelling, seem'd
Like one superior; dumbly he would steal
To the burnside, or into Lintlin Woods,

With some new-farrant book,—and when I peep'd,
Behold a book of jingling-jangling rhyme,
Fine-written nothings on a printed page;
And, press'd between the leaves, a flower perchance,
Anemone or blue Forget-me-not,
Pluckt in the grassy woodland. Then I peep'd
Into his drawer, among his papers there,
And found—you guess?—a heap of idle rhymes,
Big-sounding, like the worthless printed book:
Some in old copies scribbled, some on scraps
Of writing paper, others finely writ
With spirls and flourishes on big white sheets.
I clench'd my teeth, and groan'd. The beauteous dream
Of the good Preacher in his braw black dress,
With house and income snug, began to fade
Before the picture of a drunken loon
Bawling out songs beneath the moon and stars,—
Of poet Willie Clay, who wrote a book
About King Robert Bruce, and aye got fu',
And scatter'd stars in verse, and aye got fu',
Wept the world's sins, and then got fu' again,—
Of Ferguson, the feckless limb o' law,—
And Robin Burns, who gauged the whisky-casks

And brake the seventh commandment. So at once
I up and said to Andrew, "You're a fool!
You waste your time in silly senseless verse,
Lame as your own conceit: take heed! take heed!
Or, like your betters, come to grief ere long!"
But Andrew flusht and never spake a word,
Yet eyed me sidelong with his beaded een,
And turn'd awa', and, as he turn'd, his look—
Half scorn, half sorrow—stang me. After that,
I felt he never heeded word of ours,
And tho' we tried to teach him common-sense
He idled as he pleased; and many a year,
After I spake him first, that look of his
Came dark between us, and I held my tongue,
And felt he scorn'd me for the poetry's sake.
This coldness grew and grew, until at last
We sat whole nights before the fire and spoke
No word to one another. One fine day,
Says Mister Mucklewraith to me, says he,
"So! you've a Poet in your house!" and smiled;
"A Poet? God forbid!" I cried; and then
It all came out: how Andrew slyly sent
Verse to the paper; how they printed it

In Poets' Corner; how the printed verse
Had ca't a girdle in the callant's head;
How Mistress Mucklewraith they thought half daft
Had cut the verses out and pasted them
In albums, and had praised them to her friends.
I said but little; for my schemes and dreams
Were tumbling down like castles in the air,
And all my heart seem'd hardening to stone.
But after that, in secret stealth, I bought
The papers, hunted out the printed verse,
And read it like a thief; thought some were good,
And others foolish havers, and in most
Saw naething, neither common-sense nor sound—
Words pottle-bellied, meaningless, and strange,
That strutted up and down the printed page,
Like Bailies made to bluster and look big.

'Twas useless grumbling. All my silent looks
Were lost, all Mysie's flyting fell on ears
Choke-full of other counsel; but we talk'd
In bed o' nights, and Mysie wept, and I
Felt stubborn, wrothful, wrong'd. It was to be!
But mind you, though we mourn'd, we ne'er forsook

The college scheme. Our sorrow, as we saw
Our Andrew growing cold to homely ways,
And scornful of the bield, but strengthen'd more
Our wholesome wish to educate the lad,
And do our duty by him, and help him on
With our rough hands—the Lord would do the rest,
The Lord would mend or mar him. So at last,
New-clad from top to toe in homespun cloth,
With books and linen in a muckle trunk,
He went his way to college; and we sat,
Mysie and me, in weary darkness here;
For tho' the younger bairns were still about,
It seem'd our hearts had gone to Edinglass
With Andrew, and were choking in the reek
Of Edinglass town.

It was a gruesome fight,
Both for oursel's at home, and for the boy,
That student life at college. Hard it was
To scrape the fees together, but beside,
The lad was young and needed meat and drink.
We sent him meal and bannocks by the train,
And country cheeses; and with this and that,

Though sorely push'd, he throve, though now and then
With empty wame: spinning the siller out
By teaching grammar in a school at night.
Whiles he came home: weary old-farrant face
Pale from the midnight candle; bringing home
Good news of college. Then we shook awa'
The old sad load, began to build again
Our airy castles, and were hopeful Time
Would heal our wounds. But, sir, they plagued me still—
Some of his ways! When here, he spent his time
In yonder chamber, or about the woods,
And by the waterside,—and with him books
Of poetry, as of old. Mysel' could get
But little of his company or tongue;
And when we talkt, atweel, a kind of frost,—
My consciousness of silly ignorance,
And worse, my knowledge that the lad himsel'
Felt sorely, keenly, all my ignorant shame,
Made talk a torture out of which we crept
With burning faces. Could you understand
One who was wild as if he found a mine
Of golden guineas, when he noticed first
The soft green streaks in a snowdrop's inner leaves?

And once again, the moonlight glimmering
Thro' watery transparent stalks of flax?
A flower's a flower! . . . But Andrew snooved about,
Aye finding wonders, mighty mysteries,
In things that ilka learless cottar kenn'd.
Now, 'twas the falling snow or murmuring rain;
Now, 'twas the laverock singing in the sun,
And dropping slowly to the callow young;
Now, an old tune he heard his mother lilt;
And aye those trifles made his pallid face
Flush brighter, and his een flash keener far,
Than when he heard of yonder storm in France,
Or a King's death, or, if the like had been,
A city's downfall.

He was born with love
For things both great and small; yet seem'd to prize
The small things best. To me, it seem'd indeed
The callant cared for nothing for itsel',
But for some special quality it had
To set him thinking, thinking, or bestow
A tearful sense he took for luxury.
He loved us in his silent fashion weel;

But in our feckless ignorance we knew
'Twas when the humour seized him—with a sense
Of some queer power we had to waken up
The poetry—ay, and help him in his rhyme!
A kind of patronising tenderness,
A pitying pleasure in our Scottish speech
And homely ways, a love that made him note
Both ways and speech with the same curious joy
As fill'd him when he watch'd the birds and flowers.

He was as sore a puzzle to us then
As he had been before. It puzzled us,
How a big lad, down-cheek'd, almost a man,
Could pass his time in silly childish joys . . .
Until at last, a hasty letter came
From Andrew, telling he had broke awa'
From college, pack'd his things, and taken train
To London city, where he hoped (he said)
To make both fortune and a noble fame
Thro' a grand poem, carried in his trunk;
How, after struggling on with bitter heart,
He could no longer bear to fight his way
Among the common scholars; and the end

Bade us be hopeful, trusting God, and sure
The light of this old home would guide him still
Amid the reek of evil.

Sae it was!
We twa were less amazed than you may guess,
Though we had hoped, and fear'd, and hoped, sae long!
But it was hard to bear—hard, hard, to bear!
Our castle in the clouds was gone for good;
And as for Andrew—other lads had ta'en
The same mad path, and learn'd the bitter task
Of poortith, cold, and tears. She grat. I sat
In silence, looking on the fuffing fire,
Where streets and ghaistly faces came and went,
And London city crumbled down to crush
Our Andrew; and my heart was sick and cold.
Ere long, the news across the country-side
Speak quickly, like the crowing of a cock
From farm to farm—the women talkt it o'er
On doorsteps, o'er the garden rails; the men
Got fu' upon it at the public-house,
And whisper'd it among the fields at work.
A cry was quickly raised from house to house,

That all the blame was mine, and canker'd een
Lookt cold upon me, as upon a kind
Of upstart. "Fie on pride!" the whisper said,
The fault was Andrew's less than those who taught
His heart to look in scorn on honest work,—
Shame on them!—but the lad, poor lad, would learn!
O sir, the thought of this spoil'd many a web
In yonder—tingling, tingling, in my ears,
Until I fairly threw my gloom aside,
Smiled like a man whose heart is light and young,
And with a future-kenning happy look
Threw up my chin, and bade them wait and see . .
But, night by night, these een lookt Londonways,
And saw my laddie wandering all alone
'Mid darkness, fog, and reek, growing afar
To dark proportions and gigantic shape—
Just as the figure of a sheep-herd looms,
Awful and silent, thro' a mountain mist.

Ye aiblins ken the rest. At first, there came
Proud letters, swiftly writ, telling how folk
Now roundly call'd him 'Poet,' holding out
Bright pictures, which we smiled at wearily—

As people smile at pictures in a book,
Untrue but bonnie. Then the letters ceased,
There came a silence cold and still as frost,—
We sat and hearken'd to our beating hearts,
And pray'd as we had never pray'd before.
Then lastly, on the silence broke the news
That Andrew, far awa', was sick to death,
And, weary, weary of the noisy streets,
With aching head and weary hopeless heart,
Was coming home from mist and fog and noise
To grassy lowlands and the caller air.

'Twas strange, 'twas strange!—but this, the weary end
Of all our bonnie biggins in the clouds,
Came like a tearful comfort. Love sprang up
Out of the ashes of the household fire,
Where Hope was fluttering like the loose white film;
And Andrew, our own boy, seem'd nearer now
To this old dwelling and our aching hearts
Than he had ever been since he became
Wise with book-learning. With an eager pain,
I met him at the train and brought him home;
And when we met that sunny day in hairst,

The ice that long had sunder'd us had thaw'd,
We met in silence, and our een were dim.
Och, I can see that look of his this night!
Part pain, part tenderness—a weary look
Yearning for comfort such as God the Lord
Puts into parents' een. I brought him here.
Gently we set him here beside the fire,
And spake few words, and hush'd the noisy house;
Then eyed his hollow cheeks and lustrous een,
His clammy hueless brow and faded hands,
Blue vein'd and white like lily-flowers. The wife
Forgot the sickness of his face, and moved
With light and happy footstep but and ben,
As though she welcomed to a merry feast
A happy guest. In time, out came the truth:
Andrew was dying: in his lungs the dust
Of cities stole unseen, and hot as fire
Burnt,—like a deil's red een that gazed at Death.
Too late for doctor's skill, tho' doctor's skill
We had in plenty; but the ill had ta'en
Too sure a grip. Andrew was dying, dying:
The beauteous dream had melted like a mist
The sunlight feeds on: a' remaining now,

Was Andrew, bare and barren of his pride,
Stark of conceit, a weel-belovëd child,
Helpless to help himsel', and dearer thus,
As when his yaumer*—like the corn-craik's cry
Heard in a field of wheat at dead o' night—
Brake on the hearkening darkness of the bield.

And as he nearer grew to God the Lord,
Nearer and dearer ilka day he grew
To Mysie and mysel'—our own to love,
The world's no longer. For the first last time,
We twa, the lad and I, could sit and crack
With open hearts—free-spoken, at our ease;
I seem'd to know as muckle then as he,
Because I was sae sad.

Thus grief, sae deep
It flow'd without a murmur, brought the balm
Which blunts the edge of worldly sense and makes
Old people weans again. In this sad time,
We never troubled at his childish ways;
We seem'd to share his pleasure when he sat

* *Yaumer*, a child's cry.

List'ning to birds upon the eaves; we felt
Small wonder when we found him weeping o'er
His old torn books of pencill'd thoughts and verse;
And if, outbye, I saw a bonnie flower,
I pluckt it carefully and bore it home
To my sick boy. To me, it somehow seem'd
His care for lovely earthly things had changed—
Changed from the curious love it once had been,
Grown larger, bigger, holier, peacefuller;
And though he never lost the luxury
Of loving beauteous things for poetry's sake,
His heart was God the Lord's, and he was calm.
Death came to lengthen out his solemn thoughts
Like shadows to the sunset. So no more
We wonder'd. What is folly in a lad
Healthy and heartsome, one with work to do,
Befits the freedom of a dying man. . .
Mother, who chided loud the idle lad
Of old, now sat her sadly by his side,
And read from out the Bible soft and low,
Or lilted lowly, keeking in his face,
The old Scots songs that made his een so dim.
I went about my daily work as one

Who waits to hear a knocking at the door,
Ere Death creeps in and shadows those that watch;
And seated here at e'en i' the ingleside,
I watch'd the pictures in the fire and smoked
My pipe in silence; for my head was fu'
Of many rhymes the lad had made of old
(Rhymes I had read in secret, as I said),
No one of which I minded till they came
Unsummon'd, murmuring about my ears
Like bees among the leaves.

The end drew near.
Came Winter moaning, and the Doctor said
That Andrew couldna live to see the Spring;
And day by day, while frost was hard at work,
The lad grew weaker, paler, and the blood
Came redder from the lung. One Sabbath day—
The last of winter, for the caller air
Was drawing sweetness from the barks of trees—
When down the lane, I saw to my surprise
A snowdrop blooming underneath a birk,
And gladly pluckt the flower to carry home
To Andrew. Ere I reach'd the bield, the air

Was thick wi' snow, and ben in yonder room
I found him, Mysie seated at his side,
Drawn to the window in the old arm-chair,
Gazing wi' lustrous een and sickly cheek
Out on the shower, that waver'd softly down
In glistening siller glamour. Saying nought,
Into his hand I put the year's first flower,
And turn'd awa' to hide my face; and he . .
. . He smiled . . and at the smile, I knew not why,
It swam upon us, in a frosty pain,
The end was come at last, at last, and Death
Was creeping ben, his shadow on our hearts.
We gazed on Andrew, call'd him by his name,
And touch'd him softly . . and he lay awhile,
His een upon the snow, in a dark dream,
Yet neither heard nor saw; but suddenly,
He shook awa' the vision wi' a smile,
Raised lustrous een, still smiling, to the sky,
Next upon us, then dropt them to the flower
That trembled in his hand, and murmur'd low,
Like one that gladly murmurs to himsel'—
"Out of the Snow, the Snowdrop—out of Death
Comes Life;" then closed his eyes and made a moan,

And never spake another word again.

. . And you think weel of Andrew's book? You think
That folk will love him, for the poetry's sake,
Many a year to come? We take it kind
You speak so weel of Andrew!—As for me,
I can make naething of the printed book;
I am no scholar, sir, as I have said,
And Mysie there can just read print a wee.
Ay! we are feckless, ignorant of the world!
And though 'twere joy to have our boy again
And place him far above our lowly house,
We like to think of Andrew as he was
When, dumb and wee, he hung his gold and gems
Round Mysie's neck; or—as he is this night—
Lying asleep, his face to heaven—asleep,
Near to our hearts, as when he was a bairn,
Without the poetry and human pride
That came between us to our grief, langsyne.

WHITE LILY OF WEARDALE-HEAD.

THE ELVES.

ALL day the sunshine loves to dwell
Upon the pool of Weardale Well;
But when the sunbeams shine no more
  The Monk stalks down the moonlit dell:
His robe is black, his hair is hoar,
  He sits him down by Weardale Well;
He hears the water moan below,
He sees a face as white as snow,
His nightly penance there is done,
And he shall never see the sun.

THE MONK.

Hear them, old Anatomy!

Down the glade I see them flee—
White-robed Elfins, three times three!

THE ELVES.

Night by night, in pale moonlight,
The Monk shall tell his story o'er,
And the grinning Gnome with teeth of white
Hearkeneth laughing evermore;
His nightly penance thus is done—
And he shall never see the sun!

THE GNOME.

Ever new and ever old,
Comrade, be thy story told,
While the face as white as snow
Sighs upon the pool below

THE MONK.

"I love the sunshine," said
White Lily of Weardale-head.

And underneath the greenwood tree,
She wander'd free, she wander'd bold;

The merry sun smiled bright to see,
  And turn'd her yellow hair to gold:
Then the bee, and the moth, and the butterfly
  Hunting for sweets in the wood-bowers fair,
Rose from the blooms as she wander'd by,
  And play'd in the light of her shining hair.
She sat her down by Weardale Well,
And her gleaming ringlets rustled and fell,
Clothing her round with a golden glow,
And her shadow was light for the pool below;
Then the yellow adder fold in fold
Writhed from his lair in the grass and roll'd
With glittering scales in a curl o' the gold:
She stroked his head with her finger light,
  And he gazed with still and glistening eye;
And she laught and clapt her hands of white,
  And overhead the sun went by
  Thro' the azure gulfs of a cloudless sky;
"All things that love the sun, love me,
And O but the sun is sweet to see,
And I love to look on the sun," said she.

  But the Abbess grey of Lintlin Brae

Hated to look on the light of day;
She mumbled prayers, she counted beads,
  She whipt and whipt her shoulders bare,
She slept on a bed of straw and reeds,
  And wore a serk of horse's hair.
By candle-light she sat and read,
  And heard a song from far-away,
She cross'd herself and raised her head—
  "Who sings so loud?" said the Abbess grey.
I, who sat both early and late
A shadow black at the Abbey gate
"Mater sacra, it is one
Who wanders evermore in the sun,
A little maiden of Weardale-head,
Whose father and mother have long been dead,
But she loves to wander in greenwood bowers,
Singing and plucking the forest flowers."
The Abbess frown'd, half quick, half dead,
"There is a sin!" the Abbess said.

I found her singing a ditty wild,
  Her gleaming locks around her roll'd;
I seized her while she sang and smiled,

And dragg'd her along by the hair of gold:
The moth and butterfly, fluttering,
Follow'd me on to Lintlin Brae,
The adder leapt at my heart to sting,
But with sandall'd heel I thrust it away;
And the bee dropt down ere I was 'ware
On the hand that gript the yellow hair,
And stang me deep, and I cursed aloud,
And the sun went in behind a cloud!

THE ELVES.

Nightly be his penance done!
He shall never see the sun!

THE MONK

The cell was deep, the cell was cold,
It quench'd the light of her hair of gold
One little loop alone was there,
One little eye-hole letting in
A slender ray of light as thin
As a tress of yellow hair.

"Oh for the sunshine!" said

White Lily of Weardale-head;
And in the dark she lay,
Reaching her fingers small
To feel the little ray
That glimmer'd down the wall.

And while she linger'd white as snow
She heard a fluttering faint and low;
And stealing thro' the looplet thin
The moth and butterfly crept in—
With golden shadows as they flew
They waver'd up and down in air,
Then dropping slowly ere she knew,
Fell on her eyes and rested there:
And O she slept with balmy sighs,
Dreaming a dream of golden day,
The shining insects on her eyes,
Their shadows on her cheeks, she lay;
And while she smiled on pleasant lands,
On the happy sky and wood and stream,
I, creeping in with outstretch'd hands,
Murder'd the things that brought the dream.
She woke and stretch'd her hands and smiled,

Then gazed around with sunless eyes,
Her white face gloom'd, her heart went wild,
She sank with tears and sighs.
"Oh for the sunshine!" said
White Lily of Weardale-head.

And while she lay with cries and tears,
There came a humming in her ears;
And stealing through the looplet thin
The yellow honey-bee crept in,
And hover'd round with summer sound
Round and around the gloomy cell;
Then softly on her lips he fell,
And moisten'd them with sweetness found
Among the flowers by Weardale Well;
And O she smiled and sang a song,
And closed her eyelids in the shade,
And thought she singing walkt among
The lily-blooms in the greenwood glade.
I heard the song and downward crept,
And enter'd cold and black as sin,
And slew, although she raved and wept,
The bee that brought the sweetness in:

"Oh for the sunshine!" said
White Lily of Weardale-head.

And while she lay as white as snow
She heard a hissing sad and low;
And writhing through the looplet thin
The little yellow snake crept in:
His golden coils cast shadows dim,
  With glistening eye he writhed and crept,
And while she smiled to welcome him,
  Into her breast he stole, and slept;
And O his coils fell warm and sweet
Upon her heart and husht its beat,
And softest thrills of pleasure deep
Ran through her, though she could not sleep
But lay with closëd eyes awake,
Her little hand upon the snake—
"All things that love the sun, love me,
And O but the sun is sweet to see!
And I long to look on the sun," said she.

Then down, on sandall'd foot, I crept,
  To kill the snake that heal'd the pang,

But up, with waving arms, she leapt,
  And out across the threshold sprang,
And up the shadowy Abbey stairs,
Past the gray Abbess at her prayers,
Through the black court with leap and run,
Out at the gate, and into the sun!
There for a space she halted, blind
  With joy to feel the light again,
But heard my rushing foot behind,
  And sped along the Abbey lane;
The sunshine made her strong and fleet,
  As on she fled by field and fold,
Her shining locks fell to her feet
  In ring on ring of living gold;
But the sun went in behind a cloud,
  As I gript her by the shining locks,
I gript them tight, I laught aloud,
  The echoes rang through woods and rocks;
Moaning she droopt, then up she sprang,
The adder leapt at my heart and stang,
And like a flash o' the light she fell
Into the depths of Weardale Well.

The adder stang with fatal fang,
Around I whirl'd and shriek'd and sprang,
  Then fell and struggled, clenching teeth;
Then to the oozy grass I clang,
  And gazed upon the pool beneath;
The white death-film was on mine eye,
Yet look'd I down in agony;
And as I look'd in throes of death,
In shining bubbles rose her breath
And burst in little rings of light,
  And upward came a moaning sound;
But suddenly the sun shone bright,
  And all the place was gold around,
And to the surface, calm and dead,
Uprose White Lily of Weardale-head:
Her golden hair around her blown
Made gentle radiance of its own;
Her face was turn'd to the summer sky
  With smile that seem'd to live and speak,
The golden moth and butterfly,
  With glowing shadows, on her cheek;
And lying on her lips apart
  The honey-bee with wings of gold,

And sleeping softly on her heart
  The yellow adder fold in fold;
And as I closed mine eyes to die,
Overhead the sun went by
Through the azure gulfs of a cloudless sky!

THE ELVES.

All day the sunshine loves to dwell
Upon the sleep of Weardale Well;
All day there is a gentle sound,
  And little insects pause and sing,
The butterfly and moth float round,
  The bee drops down with humming wing,
And all the pool lies clear and cold,
Yet glittering like hair of gold.
All day the Monk in hollow shell
  Lies dumb among the Abbey-tombs,
While, in the grass and foxglove-blooms,
The adder basks by Weardale Well;
But the adder stings his heart by night:
  His tale is told, his penance done,
His eyes are dark, they long for light,
  Yet they shall never see the sun!

THE ENGLISH HUSWIFE'S GOSSIP.

A ploughman's English wife, bright-eyed, sharp-speech'd,
Plump as a pillow, fresh as clothes new-bleach'd:
The firelight dancing ruddy on her cheeks,
Irons Tom's Sunday linen as she speaks.

At three-and-forty, simple as a child,
Soft as a sheep yet curious as a daw,
Wise, cunning, in a fashion of his own,
Queer, watchful, strange, a puzzle to us all :—
That's John!

My husband's brother—seven years
Younger than Tom. When we were wed and one,
John came to dwell with Tom and me for good,
And now has dwelt beside us twenty years,
But now, at forty-three, is breaking fast,
Grows weaker, brain and body, every day.

At times he works, and earns his meat and drink,
At times is sick, and lies and moans in bed,
Beside the noisy clishmaclavering
He makes when he is glad. A natural!
Man-bodied, but in many things a child;
Unfinish'd somewhere—where, the Lord knows best
Who made and guards him; wiser, craftier,
Than Tom, or any other man I know,
In tiny things few men perceive at all;
No fool at cooking, clever at his work,
Thoughtful when Tom is senseless and unkind,
Kind with a grace that sweetens silentness,—
But weak where other working-men are strong,
And strong where they are weak. An angry word
From one he loves,—and off he creeps in pain—
Perhaps to ease his tender heart in tears.
But easy-sadden'd, sir, is easy-pleased!
Give him the babe to nurse, he sits him down,
Smiles like a woman, and is glad at heart.

Crazed? There's the question! Mister Mucklewraith,
Your friend—and John's as well—will answer "No!"
And often has he scolded when I seem'd

To answer "Yea." Of late the weary limbs
Have tried the weary brain, that every day
Grows feebler, duller; yet the Minister
Still stands his friend and helps him as he can.
"Tender of heart," says Mister Mucklewraith,
"Tender of heart, goodwife, is wise of head:
If John is weak, his heart is to be blamed;
And can the erring heart of mortal be
O'er gentle?" Hey, 'tis little use to talk!
The Minister is soft at heart as he!

Talk of the . . John! and home again so soon?
The children are at school, the dinner o'er,
Tom still is busy working at the plough.
Weary?—then sit you down and rest awhile.
John fears all strangers—is ashamed to speak—
But stares and counts his fingers o'er as now,
Yet—trust him!—when you vanish he will tell
The colour of your hair, your hat, your clothes,
The number of the buttons on your coat—
Eh, John?—he laughs—as sly as sly can be!

Now, run to Tom—as quickly as you can—

Say he is wanted by the gentleman
[Tom knows the name] from Mister Mucklewraith's.

Off, like an arrow from a bow, you see!
That's nothing! John would run until he dropt,
For me, and need no thanking but a smile,
Would work and work his fingers to the bone,
Do aught I asked, without or in the house,—
And just because I cheer him merrily
And speak him kindly. Tom he little likes,
And would not budge a single step to serve,
For Tom is rough, and says I humour him,
And mocks him for his silly childish ways.
And Tom has reason to be wroth at times!
But yesterday John sat him on a stool,
And ripp'd the bellows up, to find from where
The wind came: slowly did it bit by bit,
As sage as Solomon, and when 'twas done
Just scratch'd his head, still puzzled, creeping off
To some still corner in the lowland, there
To think the puzzle out in peace alone.
There is his weakness—curiosity!
Those watchful, prying, curious eyes of his,

That like a cat's see better in the dark,
Are ne'er at rest; his hands and eyes and ears
Are eager getting knowledge,—when 'tis got
Lord knoweth in what corner of his head
He hides it, but it ne'er sees light again!

Oft he reminds me of a painter lad
Who came to Inverburn a summer since,
Went poking everywhere with pallid face,
Thought, painted, wander'd in the woods alone,
Work'd a long morning at a leaf or flower,
And got the name of clever. John and he
Made friends—a thing I never could make out;
But, bless my life! it seem'd to me the lad
Was just a John who had learnt to read and paint!

He buys a coat: what does he first, but count
The pockets and the buttons one by one—
A mighty calculation sagely summ'd;
Our eldest daughter goes to Edinglass,
Brings home a box—John eyes the box with greed,
And next, we catch him in the lassie's room,
The box wide open, John upon the floor,

And in his hand a bonnet, eyed and eyed,
Turn'd o'er and o'er, examined bit by bit,
Like something wondrous as a tumbled star;
Our youngest has a gift—a box of toys,
A penny trumpet—not a wink for John
Till he has seen the whole, or by and by
He gives the child a sixpence for the toy,
And creeps away and cuts it up to bits
In wonder and in joy. It makes me cry
For fun to watch his pranks, the natural!
But think not, sir, that he was ever so:—
Nay! twenty years ago but few could tell
That he was simpler than the rest of men—
His step was firm, he kept his head erect,
Could hold his tongue, because he knew full well
That he was simpler-headed than the rest.—
Now, when his wits have gone so fast asleep,
He thinks he is the wisest man of men!
Yet, sir, his heart is kindly to the core,
Tho' sensitive to touch as fly-trap flowers:
He loves them best that seem to think him wise,
Consult him, notice him, and those that mock
His tenderness he never will forgive.

Money ne saves to buy the children gifts—
Clothes, toys, whate'er he fancies like to please—
And many of his ways so tender are,
So gentle and so good, it fires my blood
To see him vex'd and troubled. Just a child!
He weeps in silence, if a little ill;
A cold, a headache—he is going to die;
But then, beside, he can be trusted, sir!
(Ye cannot say the like of many men!)
Tell him a secret,—torture, death itself,
Would fail to make him whisper and betray.

Nay, sit you down—and smoke? Ay, smoke your fill
Both John and father like their cutty-pipe;
Tom will be here as fast as he can come;
And I can crack and talk as well as work.

John, simple as he is, has had his cares:
They came upon him in his younger days
When he was tougher-headed, and I think
They help'd to make him silly as he is:
Time that has stolen all his little wits,
By just a change of chances, might have made

Our John another man and strengthen'd him.
The current gave a swirl, and caught the straw,
And John was doom'd to be a natural!
Oft when he sits and smokes his pipe and thinks,
Ye know by his downcast eyes and quivering lips
His heart is aching; but he ne'er complains
Of *that*—the sorest thought he has to bear.
We know he thinks of Jessie Glover then;
But let him be, till o'er his head the cloud
Passes and leaves a meekness and a hush
Upon the heart it shadow'd. Jessie, sir?—
She was a neighbour's daughter in her teens,
A bold and forward huzzie, tho' her face
Was pretty in its way: a jet-black eye,
Red cheeks, black eyebrows, and a comely shape
The petticoat and short-gown suited well.
In here she came and stood and talk'd for hours
[Her tongue was like a bell upon a sheep—
Her very motion seem'd to make it jing]
And, ere I guess'd it, John and she were friends.
She pierced the silly with her jet-black eye,
Humour'd him ever, seem'd to think him wise,
Was serious, gentle, kindly, to his face,

And, ere I guess'd, so flatter'd his conceit
That, tho' his lips were silent at her side,
He grew a mighty man behind her back,
Held up his head in gladness and in pride,
And seem'd to have an errand in the world.
At first I laugh'd and banter'd with the rest—
"How's Jessie, John?" and "Name the happy day;"
And "Have ye spoken to the minister?"
Thinking it just a joke; and when the lass
Would sit by John, her arm about his neck,
Holding his hand in hers, and humour him,
Yet laugh her fill behind the silly's back,
I let it pass. I little liked her ways—
I guess'd her heart was tough as cobbler's wax—
Yet what of that?—'Twas but a piece of fun.

A piece of fun!—'Twas serious work to John!
The huzzie lured him with her wicked eyes,
And danced about him, ever on the watch,
Like pussie yonder playing with a mouse.
I saw but little of them, never dream'd
They met unknown to me; but by and by
The country-side was ringing with the talk

That John and she went walking thro' the fields,
Sat underneath the slanted harvest sheaves
Watching the motion of the silver moon,
Met late and early—courted night and day—
John earnest as you please, and Jess for fun.
I held my peace awhile, and used my eyes!
New bows and ribbons upon Jessie's back,
Cheap brooches, and a bonnet once or twice,
Proved that the piece of fun paid Jessie well,
And showed why John no longer spent his pence
In presents to the boys. I saw it all,
But, pitying John, afraid to give him pain
I spake to Jessie, sharply bade her heed,
Cried "shame" upon her, for her heartlessness.
The huzzie laugh'd and coolly went her way,
And after that came hither nevermore
To talk and clatter. But the cruel sport
Went on, I found. One day, to my surprise,
Up came a waggon to the cottage door,
John walking by the side, and while I stared
He quickly carried to the kitchen here,
A table, chairs, a wooden stool, a broom,
Two monster saucepans, and a washing tub,

And last, a roll of blankets and of sheets.
The waggon went away, here linger'd John
Among the things, and blushing red says he,
"I bought them all at Farmer Simpson's sale—
Ye'll keep them till I need them for myself!"
And then walk'd out. Long time I stood and stared,
Puzzled, amazed; but by-and-by I saw
The meaning of it all. Alas for John!
The droll beginning of a stock in trade
For marriage stood before me. Jessie's eyes
And lying tongue had made him fairly crazed,
And ta'en the little wits he had to spare.
With flushing face, set teeth, away I ran
To Jessie—found her washing at a tub,
Covered with soap-suds—and I told her all;
And for a while she could not speak a word
For laughter. "Shame upon ye, shame, shame, shame!
Thus to misuse the lad who loves ye so!
Mind, Jessie Glover, folks with scanty brains
Have hearts that can be broken!" Still she laugh'd!
While tears of mirth ran down her crimson cheeks
And mingled with the frothy suds of soap;
But trust me, sir, I went not home again

Till Jessie's parents knew her wickedness;
And last, I wrung a promise from her lips
From that day forth to trouble John no more,
To let him know her fondness was a joke,
Pass by him in the street without a word,
And, though perhaps his gentle heart might ache,
Shake him as one would shake a drunken man
Until his sleepy wits awoke again.

I watch'd that Jessie Glover kept her word.

That night, when John was seated here alone,
Smoking his pipe, and dreaming as I guess'd
Of Jessie Glover and a wedding ring,
I stole behind him silently and placed
My hand upon his shoulder: when he saw
The shadow on my face, he trembled, flush'd,
And knew that I was sad. I sank my voice,
And gently as I could I spake my mind,
Spake like a mother, told him he was wrong,
That Jessie only was befooling him
And laugh'd his love to scorn behind his back,
And last, to soothe his pain, I rail'd at her,

Hoping to make him angry. Here he sat,
And let his pipe go out, and hung his head,
And never answer'd back a single word.
'Twas hard, 'twas hard, to make him understand!
He could not, would not! All his heart was wrapt
In Jessie Glover; and at twenty-three
A full-grown notion thrusts its roots so deep,
'Tis hard indeed to drag it up without
Tearing the heart as well. Without a word
He crept away to bed. Next morn, his eyes
Were red with weeping—but 'twas plain to see
He thought I wrong'd both Jessie and himself.

That morning Jessie pass'd him on the road:
He ran to speak—she toss'd her head and laugh'd—
And sneering pass'd him by. All day he wrought
In silence at the plough—ne'er had he borne
A pang so quietly. At gloaming hour
Home came he, weary: here was I alone:
Stubborn as stone he turn'd his head away,
Sat on his stool before the fire and smoked;
Then while he smoked I saw his eyes were wet:
"John!" and I placed my hand upon his arm.

He turn'd, seem'd choking, tried in vain to speak,
Then fairly hid his face and wept aloud,—
But never wept again.

The days pass'd on.
I held my tongue, and left the rest to time,
And warn'd both father and the boys. My heart
Was sore for John! He was so dumb and sad,
Never complaining as he did of old,
And toiling late and early. By-and-by,
"Maggie," says he, as quiet as a lamb,
"Ye'll keep the things I bought at Simpson's sale—
I do not need them now!" and tried to smile,
But could not. Well, I thank'd him cheerily,
Nor seem'd to see his heart was aching so:
Then after that the boys got pence from John,—
The smaller playthings, and the bigger clothes:
He eased his heart by spending as of old
His money on the like.

Well may you cry
Shame, shame on Jessie! Heartless, graceless lass!
I could have whipt her shoulders with a staff!—

But Him above had sorer tasks in store.
Ere long the village, like a peal of bells,
Rang out the tale that Jessie was a thief,
Had gone to Innis Farm to work a week,
And stolen Maggie Fleming's watch and chain—
They found them in her trunk, with scores of things
From poorer houses. Woe to Jessie then
If Farmer Fleming had unkindly been,
Nor spared her for her sickly father's sake!
The punishment was spared—she kept the shame!
The scandal rose, with jingling-jangling din,
And chattering lassies, wives, and mothers join'd.
At first she saw not that the sin was guess'd;
But slowly, one by one, her lassie friends,
Her very bosom-gossips, shook her off:
She heard the din, she blush'd and hid her face,
Shrinking away and trembling as with cold,
Like Eve within the garden when her mouth
Was bitter with the apple of the Tree.

One night, when John returned from work and took
His seat upon the stool beside the fire,
I saw he knew the truth. For he was changed!

His look was dark, his voice was loud, his eyes
Had lost their meekness; when we spoke to him,
He flush'd and answer'd sharply. He had heard
The tale of Jessie's shame and wickedness,—
What thought he of it all? Believe me, sir,
He was a riddle still: in many things
So peevish and so simple, but in one—
His silly dream of Jessie Glover's face—
So manly and so dumb,—with power to hide
His sorrow in his heart and turn away
Like one that shuts his eyes when men pass by
But looks on Him. 'Twas natural to think
John would have taken angry spiteful joy
In Jessie's fall,—for he was ever slow
Forgetting and forgiving injuries;
But no! his voice was dumb, his eyes were fierce,
Yet chiefly when they mention'd Jess in scorn,
He seem'd confused and would not understand,
Perplext as when he breaks the children's toys.

Now, bold as Jessie was, she could not bear
The shame her sin had brought her, and whene'er
We met she tingled to the finger-tips;

And soon she fled away to Edinglass
To hide among the smoke. It came to pass,
The Sabbath after she had flitted off,
That Mister Mucklewraith (God bless him!) preach'd
One of those gentle sermons low and sad
Wherewith he gathers wheat for Him he serves:
The text—let him who is sinless cast the first
Stone at the sinner; and we knew he preach'd
Of Jessie Glover. Hey! to hear him talk
Ye would have sworn that Jessie was a saint,
An injured thing for folk to pet and coax!
But tho' ye know 'twas folly, springing up
Out of a heart so kindly to the core,
Your eyes were dim with tears while hearkening—
He spake so low and sadly. John was there.

And early down the stairs came John next day
Drest in his Sabbath clothes. "I'm going away,"
He whispers, "for a day or maybe two—
Don't be afraid if I'm away at night,
And do not speak to Tom;" and off he ran
Ere I could question. When the evening came,
No sign of John! Night pass'd, and not a sign!

Tom sought him far and near without avail.
The next night came, and we were sitting here
Weary and pensive, listening, listening,
To every step that pass'd, when in stept John,
And sat beside the fire, and when we ask'd
Where he had been, he snapt us short and crept
Away to bed.

But by-and-by, I heard
The truth from John himself—a truth indeed
That was and is a puzzle, will remain
A puzzle to the end. And can ye guess
Where John had been? Away in Edinglass,
At Jessie Glover's side, holding her hand
And looking in her eyes!

"Jessie!" he said;
And while she stared stood scraping with his shoes,
And humm'd and haw'd and stammer'd out a speech,
Whose sense, made clear and shorten'd, came to this:
The country folk that call'd her cruel names
And mock'd her so, had done the same by him!
He did not give a straw for what they said!

He did not give a straw, and why should she?
And tho' she laugh'd before, perchance when folk
Miscall'd her, frighten'd her from home and friends,
She'd turn to simple John and marry him?
For he had money, seven pound and more,
And yonder in his home, to stock a house,
He had the things he bought at Simpson's sale,
John Thomson paid him well, and he could work,
And, if she dried her eyes and married him,
Who cared for Tom and Maggie, and the folk
That thought them crazed?.. John, then and now ashamed,
Said that she flung her arms about his neck,
And wept as if her heart was like to break,
And told him sadly that it could not be.
He scratch'd his head, and stared, and answer'd nought—
His stock of words was done, but last, he forced
His money in the weeping woman's hand,
And hasten'd home as fast as he could run.

He minds it still! it haunts him night and day!
Ay, silly tho' he be, he keeps the thought
Of Jess still hidden in his heart; and now,
Wearing away like snowdrift in the sun,

If e'er he chance to see, on nights at home,
One of the things he bought at Simpson's sale
(I keep them still, tho' they are worn and old),
His eyes gleam up, then glisten,—then are dark.

THE FAËRY FOSTER-MOTHER.

I.

Bright Eyes, Light Eyes! Daughter of a Fay!
I had not been a married wife a twelvemonth and a day,
I had not nurst my little one a month upon my knee,
When down among the blue-bell banks rose elfins three times three,
They gript me by the raven hair, I could not cry for fear,
They put a hempen rope around my waist and dragg'd me here,
They made me sit and give thee suck as mortal mothers can,
Bright Eyes, Light Eyes! strange and weak and wan!

II.

Dim Face, Grim Face! lie ye there so still?
Thy red red lips are at my breast, and thou may'st suck thy fill;

But know ye, tho' I hold thee firm, and rock thee to and
fro,
'Tis not to soothe thee into sleep, but just to still my
woe?
And know ye, when I lean so calm against the wall of
stone,
'Tis when I shut my eyes and try to think thou art mine
own?
And know ye, tho' my milk be here, my heart is far
away,
Dim Face, Grim Face! Daughter of a Fay!

III.

Gold Hair, Cold Hair! Daughter to a King!
Wrapt in bands of snow-white silk with jewels glittering,
Tiny slippers of the gold upon thy feet so thin,
Silver cradle velvet-lined for thee to slumber in,
Pigmy pages, crimson-hair'd, to serve thee on their knees,
To bring thee toys and greenwood flowers and honey bags
of bees,—
I was but a peasant lass, my babe had but the milk,
Gold Hair, Cold Hair! raimented in silk!

IV.

Pale Thing, Frail Thing! dumb and weak and thin,
Altho' thou ne'er dost utter sigh thou'rt shadow'd with a
sin;
Thy minnie scorns to suckle thee, thy minnie is an elf,
Upon a bed of rose's-leaves she lies and fans herself;
And though my heart is aching so for one afar from me,
I often look into thy face and drop a tear for thee,
And I am but a peasant born, a lowly cotter's wife,
Pale Thing, Frail Thing! sucking at my life!

V.

Weak Thing, Meek Thing! take no blame from me,
Altho' my babe may fade for lack of what I give to thee;
For though thou art a stranger thing, and though thou
art my woe,
To feel thee sucking at my breast is all the joy I know,
It soothes me tho' afar away I hear my daughter call,
My heart were broken if I felt no little lips at all!
If I had none to tend at all, to be its nurse and slave,
Weak Thing, Meek Thing! I should shriek and rave!

VI.

Bright Eyes, Light Eyes! lying on my knee!
If soon I be not taken back unto mine own countree,
To feel my own babe's little lips, as I am feeling thine,
To smoothe the golden threads of hair, to see the blue
eyes shine,—
I'll lean my head against the wall and close my weary
eyes,
And think my own babe draws the milk with balmy
pants and sighs,
And smile and bless my little one and sweetly pass away,
Bright Eyes, Light Eyes! Daughter of a Fay!

THE TWO BABES.

Hugh Baird his name: a farmer well to do
Who wars against the godly worldly crew,
Six days works hard and keeps his name from spot,
But on the seventh likes his dinner hot
One hand imaginary guineas seeks
Deep in the pockets of his tartan breeks,
The other grips his gill, at which he sips
With cordial smiles and smackings of the lips;
Meanwhile, within the sound of Sabbath bells,
He tells this tale, and tipples as he tells.

I.

HERE'S health and better fortune!.. Houch, 'tis strong!-
But Sandie's whisky is a drink for kings.

That minnow of a man is Matthew Bell,
Who holds as high a head at kirk or fair
As stout Sir Walter, Laird of Wimplepen.
The Lord preserve us!—did you mark the look
The Saint vouchsafed the sinners as he pass'd,
[The *bonâ fide* sinners, let me say!]

Grown grim as Patience shivering in her sark,
To see them frighting Truth, the nymph of wells,
From water with a splash of whisky neat,
And 'tween the hours of kirk on Sabbath day
Chatting in Sandy's parlour? That's the note
The bantam crows! From here to John o' Groat's
Find me a mannikin who knows so much
About the Book of Books, or half so much
About that mighty work, the Ledger. Rich?
Ay,—as his fields of golden-tassell'd wheat!
Out of his hundred acres year by year
He reaps a bonnetful of yellow gold,
And lives on yonder hill, where silent Hairst
Is lying like an angel yellow-hair'd.

Langsyne, a child was born to Matthew Bell—
As sweet a child as ever Howdie holds
For sceptre, when she queens it in a house,
And takes the goodman's easy-chair, and makes
The sinner tremble at his own fireside;
And, when the lass was tall enough to touch
Grim Matthew's watch-chain with her golden curls,
Her mother died,—whom country tattle said

The farmer's dismal pictures of the Pit
Had frighten'd up to heaven ere her time.
But Maggie—as they named her—lived and grew,
And, Sabbath-mad as Matthew ever was,
He lack'd the power to cloud her infant smiles,
And later, I believe he lack'd the heart,—
When o'er her mother's grave she laugh'd and play'd,
Or, seated on her gloomy father's knee,
Look'd her young sunshine on his sunless eyes.

Thought Matthew most of Maggie's golden hair,
Or of his golden wheat and golden wealth?
And did he dream of one whose gleaming locks
Wound round the worms beneath the grass and flowers?
And did he fashion, as a father will,
Pictures of Maggie in her bridal dress,
With a grand tocher and a holy ring?
None knew, none knew; but bonnie Maggie Bell
Grew like a lily in the gloom—a maid
Slim, pale as any lily, when the shades
Of sixteen summers wash'd with twilight dew
The glowworms in her hair, and dark'd her eyes
From blue to deeper blue—as shades of clouds

Pass windily o'er the grass and leave their tints
Under the lids of pansies wet with rain.

Hey, poetry!—the whisky is to blame.

The holy house of Farmer Matthew kept
John Calvin's Sabbath all the gloomy week;
And morn and night poor Maggie's head was dinn'd
With Scripture phrases, and the puzzling texts
Interpreted by Mammon on his knees.
To sing, or dance, as other maidens use,
To read a paper or a fairy tale,
To eye her image in the looking-glass,
Was stark damnation, prompted by the Deil.
Weary was Maggie's lot! Her yellow hair
Was fasten'd up beneath a frowsy net,
And hid beneath a bonnet strange to see
For shape and fashion; and her dress was mean
From head to foot, with no fine-colour'd bows
Such as the purest-hearted lassies love.
This grew and grew to such a pitch at last
That when the lass in secret saved a pound,
And bought herself a bonnet fit to wear,

Her father threw the same upon the fire,
And grumbled "Vanity," and glower'd and gloom'd,
While Maggie wept. Then all her maiden friends
Christen'd her *Quaker Maggie!* and she mourn'd
In secret that the world miscall'd her so:
Till in her heart she hated Sabbath-day,
And preaching, and the very Book itself,
As things that made her life a life of scorn.
What wonder if she look'd with jealous eyes
At lovely ribbons in another's cap?
Thought far far less of what the preacher said
Than of the giggling smiles the lassies cast
At her old wear, from every pew around?
And when her father question'd of the text,
Knew just as much about it as a child
Who pastes his nose against a sweetie-shop
Knows of the moon? This kind of thing in time
Made Maggie slightly sour in temper, dull
And peevish as a school-boy in the sulks,
Till, one fine day, the Farmer went his way
And brought another wife to rule the roast.

Oh, holy, holy, as the Pope's big Toe,

Was Mistress Bell the second! Half a yard
Taller than Matthew,—and a widow, Sir!
She was a woman of an ancient house,
And stoop'd, they said, to Matthew's ploughman blood.
Sir, she was tall and lean as Highland firs,
Sharp-featured like an ancient Virtue vex'd
With influenza and a constant hoast,
Nose like a glowing cinder, sharp-cut mouth
Drawn in and out with thin and oily cheeps,
And small hen's eyes, whose twinkle seem'd to say,
"Oh, am I not—confess it—am I not
A credit to Creation?" Day and night
Her cry was "Vanity, oh vanity!"—
And aye she hurl'd the vengeance of the skies
At comely hizzies dimpling in their teens.

You guess that when she came to Matthew's house,
And cast her gaze on beauteous Maggie Bell,
She loved the maid no better than a bat
Loves sunshine. There was scolding, there were tears;
This thing was wrong in Maggie, that thing wrong;
And Maggie mourn'd, and could not teach her lips
To call the grey mare "mother"; and for *him*,

Grim Matthew, haply now and then a thrill
Of fellow-feeling made his cankerous heart
Pity his child a wee, but, bless my life!
It was as much as his old ears were worth
To cross the Clishmaclaver he had wed.
So Maggie Bell began to use her tongue,
To answer back, returning scold for scold,
To utter words that bit like adders' mouths;
But mind you, she was sorely vex'd and tried.

Though mortals wrangle, still the sunshine falls;
The earth grows fruitful and the seasons change,
While mortals come and go. Around the farm
The land was spreading on from fence to fence,
Acre on acre, golden rood on rood,
And aye the money rang in Matthew's pouch;
For spite of all those pious ways of his,
And spite his married troubles in the house,
The canny farmer ne'er forsook the toil
Of making and increasing. Nay, my friend!
O'er-clever was the loon for poor half crops
And business neglected! Year by year,
His bank-books and his ledgers fatter grew

Like o'er-fed leeches; year by year he throve;
And year by year, the farm that yonder lies,
With slated room and whiten'd doors and walls,
Stood up upon the hill 'mid harvest home
Hid like a pearl in a lady's yellow hair.

Ere Maggie Bell had enter'd on her teens,
One Robin Anderson, a long-limb'd lad,
With pocket empty as a last year's nest,
Came lounging to the farm and seeking work;
And Matthew set the stranger 'mong the wheat,
Gave him a reaping hook and bade him shear,
And ere the sunset made above the hills
A mimic picture of the hairst, the lad
Had earned a strong man's hire. Matthew was pleased;
Said little; but he gave the boy a bed
Out in the byre, and there the stranger slept
Alone among the kine. A clever lad!
He wrought and shore, and earn'd both pence and praise,
Strong as a stallion, modest as a mouse;
But hark you, when the Sabbath day came round,
And Matthew cast his eyes around the kirk,
Whom should he spy, a sheep among the flock,

But Robin! . . and the laddie's looks were cast
Full modest on his book, his jet-black hair
Was neatly comb'd behind his rabbit-ears,
His poor old clothes were patch'd and cleanly brush'd,
And butter soft seem'd melting in his mouth,—
And when he met his master's canker'd gaze,
He blush'd like any maid and seem'd ashamed.

A clever lad was Robin Anderson!
A clever clever lad with fox's eyes!
A clever clever lad in lambkin's gear!
Kirk over, Matthew took him by the arm,
And, with a grim inquisitorial look,
Question'd the trembling lad upon the text,—
And scarce a word the Preacher dropt that day
But Robin had by heart. Then Matthew Bell
Was hugely pleased to see the lad so good—
So grand a worker with the reaping-hook,
And such a pattern at his prayers beside:
"Keep on, my lad," he said, "as you begin;
You'll be a wealthy man, before you die
And go to glory." After that, to kirk
Went Robin, never missing night or morn.

Next, later on, one Sabbath night, the lad
Came stumping to the kitchen, in his hand
An old torn Bible, and, with hums and haws,
And mighty fear of giving some offence,
Would have the Farmer open and expound
A text that puzzled sore. Now, nothing pleased
Old Matthew better than the like of this—
A chance of showing off the Grace of God,
And his own Scripture learning, both at once.
He smiled and took the Book, put on his specs,
And read, and as he read expounded all,
With godly-worldly comment of his own,
Till Robin stared in awe, and saw it plain,
And thank'd his teacher with a hungry look,
And with a sigh that seem'd to rend his heart
Wish'd he were half as holy, half as good,
Or half as learn'd, as Matthew. After that,
He came on other errands ben the house,
Hearken'd to Matthew like a hungry sheep,
And grew so pious, holy, and so good,
That when the wheat was shorn and strain'd and put
With golden glitter in the bank in town,
Old Matthew paid the crowd of reapers off,

But kept the creeshie Robin Anderson
To do a labourer's work about the farm.

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A clever chiel was Robin Anderson!
He never spake bad words, ne'er tasted drink,
Nor brake the seventh commandment; he was deep
In knowledge both of figures and the Book;
He taught himself to read and write and sum
While sinners were at play. So day by day
He throve and throve in Matthew Bell's esteem,
And rose and rose; till, when the house was storm'd
By Mistress Bell the second, he arranged
His cards so well, and seem'd so mild and meek,
And play'd so well on the grey mare's conceit—
Seeming to think her, not a saint alone,
But a braw woman with a beauteous face—
That Mistress Bell was won to like the man
And tuck him under her maternal wing.
To make the story short, this clever chiel,
By dint of bowing, praying, labouring,
Throve in the holy household, and so well,
That Matthew later made him overseer
O'er all the fields, and ascertain'd in time

The head and hand of Robin Anderson
Were needful to his life as meat and drink.

Meantime, poor Maggie? Year by year the lass
Had waited wearily and work'd and wept,
Seeing her mother's pitying eyes look down
Among the other stars that lit the sky;
And aye she moan'd, "O mother, art thou there?
And may I come to meet thee, minnie mine?"
But spite of tears, and anger whose blue flame
Burns out the sweetness of a comely face
Sooner than tears, and spite of weary pain,
Maggie was bonnie, bonnie, bonnie!—grew
From bonnier to bonnier year by year!
Against her will, and in her heart's despite,
Health loved her so that like an ivy's arm
It clung about her, would forsake her not,
Giving and taking beauty. She was pale,
But 'twas the pallor of a lily flower
Full-blooming, not the pallor of disease.
The passionate appeals made day and night
To one who shone above, put in her eyes
Fresh-colour'd gleams of heaven's own violet hue;

And aye the sunshine sparkling in her hair
Tangled itself like ears of golden wheat ;
And aye the tears she shed so often weigh'd
Like dew-drops on a lily's stem, and gave
Her gentle head a drooping grace more sweet
Than ruddy-featured boldness. Sombre gear,
Old-fashion'd raiment, and the like, but served
To make this beauty plainer, as the night
Shows off the modest moon. All scorn, all arts
To hide her beauteousness and humble her,
Were lost on Maggie Bell !—Darkly they fell,
Coldly and gloomily, as murmuring rain
Tumbles on beds of flowers ;—and 'mid it all
The flowers lift up their heads and vainly try
To shake the drops away, and as they toyte
They sparkle with a thousand diamond pearls,
Looking the lovelier for the load they bear !

So time wore slowly on, till Maggie Bell
Was sweet and twenty. Half the country side
Went wild about her face, the other half
Went wild about her dowry. What of that ?
Old Matthew's canker'd eyes were looking high,

Seeking a man of godliness and wealth
To wed his child and multiply his fame;
And Mistress Bell would have no idle loons
Come hanging round the farm—'twas neither right,
Nor safe, nor delicate; and, as it seem'd,
The maid herself cared little for the sport,
The juggling of the eyes and lips and mouth,
Which long ago unpetticoated Eve
First taught to breekless Adam Gardener.

Strange she should take to Robin Anderson;—
Yet so she did, though Matthew guess'd it not,
And no suspicion of the friendship struck
The Clishmaclaver. Many a kindly turn
Sly Robin did for Maggie; many a time
He screen'd her from the storm!—I knew him well,
And, just when Maggie's beauty was full-blown,
I noticed that a change came over him:
He went to kirk no less, but it was plain
His thoughts were troublesome and ill at ease;
Often when spoken to, he started, blush'd,
Seem'd shamed like one detected in a theft;
In kirk, forgot to look upon the book,

And glinted nervously aroundabout.
This puzzled me ;—but Robin Anderson
Was softer hearted than he wish'd to seem—
Had kindliness beneath his sombre gear—
Would smile and place his finger on his lips
If now and then I mock'd his creeshie ways—
And, what was more, was passionate, I knew,
In certain sad and fleshly vanities,
Like other men, from Adam down to me.

At last, the lily-flower on Maggie's cheek
Grew sickly, and an icy glitter struck
The sweetness from her eyes ; she answer'd back,
To them that chid her, with an angry tongue ;
And hollow, hollow, up and down the house,
With mixtie-maxtie echoes plump'd the foot
That once had fall'n as soft as flakes of snow.
Her father watch'd her with his yellow eye ;
The Clishmaclaver shrugg'd her thin old back
And sneer'd and mutter'd, daring not to speak
Out loudly, for the lassie's fiend was up ;
And Robin Anderson, with oily grace,
Strove hard to make the sunder'd house agree,

But vainly. By and by 'twas plain to see
That Maggie wander'd in a kind of mist,
Confused and lost, for when you spake, and loud,
She listen'd dreamily like one who hears
The hollow chiming of a far-off bell;
And now the maiden who, though sorely tried,
Had aye a pattern been of cleanly ways,
Was heedless of the judgment of the world
As nettles running ragged in a lane.

This could not last for long. Came harvest-time,
And reapers flock'd with hooks to Matthew's farm;
And round the farm, around, above, below,
The fields rose thick and yellow with the grain;
And o'er the fields the buzzing murmur sped;
And o'er the fields the shadows of the clouds
Pass'd dark, in patches, in their own soft wind.
Ne'er had the moon's moist horn been fill'd so high
With ripeness, gold, and fragrance. So the heart
Of Matthew crow'd, as loud as any cock.
But on the Sabbath day, the first of hairst,
The Farmer and his wife sat ben the house
With Robin Overseer, and crack'd and talk'd

Of holy matters spiced with thoughts of gain,
Till time for prayers; and when the time was come,
And all the house was summon'd, Matthew cried,
"Where's Maggie?"—but no Maggie heard the cry;
And Mistress Bell went flyting thro' the farm,
From room to room; while from the house the call
For Maggie pass'd into the fields and byres:
But Maggie came not; at the last upran
A cotter's lass, barefooted, pale to see,
Who cried with many a stammer, many a pause,
"O mem! O Mistress Bell! O Mister Bell!
You're looking oot for Maggie, are you no'?
But Maggie's gane!" "Gone!" screech'd the quire, "gone where?"
"O mem, to Edinglass," the lassie cried.
"I met her down the lawlan all her lane,
And she was greeting sair, and when I look'd
She stay'd and tellt me a', and bade me gie
This message to her faither—'Tell him, Meg,'
Says she, 'I'm gaun awa,' says she, 'for gude,
Ne'er to return, but that I pray the Lord
May ne'er be hard wi' him as him wi' me,
Nor bring him to as sair a shamefu' end;'

And then wi' pale, pale face she slipt awa',
Afore I kenn'd her meaning, and was gane!"

Sir, so it was. There was a wild to-do,
Old Matthew glared and gloom'd like one gone wild,
The Clishmaclaver fainted. Far and near
The reapers search'd and search'd, along the roads,
And down the village; but they sought in vain.
Yet Maggie reach'd not Edinglass that night,
Nor the next night, nor many a night to come;
For as she ran beneath the moon, a swoon
Struck her like blinding moonshine, and her limbs
Just served to bear her to a cotter's door,
And there, with clenching teeth and hands, she fell.
The cotter's wife, who knew her, bare her in;
And there she lay; and ere the pallid dawn
Stared in upon her with its dead man's eyes,
There came the fitful crying of a child,
And Maggie, white and shuddering, shriek'd to hear.

Such news spreads quickly. Ere the day was done,
Poor Maggie's shame was common whisper'd talk
O'er all the country-side—at cottage hearths,

And in the harvest fields. The black news came
To Matthew, where he wrought with hook himself
(So eager was he for the harvest gain)
Among the reapers; and he call'd a curse
On Maggie and her child, clenching his fists
To scream his godly thunder; lastly cried
To Robin Anderson, whose eyes droop'd down:
"Go to the lassie—go—and go at once—
And tell her, if she cross my path again,
I draw my fist across her shameless face
And tread her under foot; and tell her, too,
That, day or night, be't sawing or be't hairst,
My prayers will call a curse upon her head!"
And Robin strode away without a word,
As grim and gloomy as a thunder-cloud;
And ere an hour came back into the field,
And told his master he had done his will;
"What said she?" ask'd the Farmer, frowning fierce,
And ground his heel upon the stubbly soil—
"Nought!" answer'd Robin, short,—and turn'd away,
Biting his lips and scowling on the ground,
And wrought in silence till the sun was set.

II.

O bitter, bitter, was the Farmer's heart,
And all his pleasure of the Hairst was sour'd!
But when the Clishmaclaver, giving tongue,
Began that night to rail on Maggie's shame,
Grim Matthew sharply bade her hold her peace,
Nor mention Maggie more; and Mistress Bell,
Knowing the man was fierce to have his way,
Stopt short and lookt as sour as buttermilk.
Then all was dreary silence in the house;
And Matthew took the Book, put on his specs,
And tried to read, but aye the specs grew dim
With moisture from his eyes; till, with a cry,
Almost a curse, he closed the Book and rush'd
Forth to the outer darkness. Who could sound
The Farmer's thoughts? and were they something sad
And did pale Conscience put her horse-hair on?

I know not; but for long and weary hours
He wander'd out among the wheat; near dawn
Saw the moist stars that loosen'd one by one
From Night's grey robe like jewels from a dress;
And at the break of day return'd—with eyes
Crimson, and not thro' weeping, with his cheeks
As pale as frost upon a cold grey pane,
But cats'-claws at the edges of the lips
To show a selfish fiend was uppermost.

You guess the neighbours, both the rich and poor,
Were little loth to see so taken down
The Farmer's pride and Mistress Bell's conceit.
Clang, clang, went Scandal, sounding like a chime
From cottage unto cottage, till the place
Was jingling like a belfry out of tune.
Then, with the cruel clangour in her ears,
Poor Maggie clasp'd her child and fled away
To Edinglass; and in that cloud of life
She faded like a brownie in a mist.
The Clishmaclaver, though she made a fuss,
Was strong in constitution, and her heart
Not apt to break so easily: poor lamb,

She bore her trouble like a saint in stone.
But Matthew went about with mildew'd heart,
Ne'er wept, and wrought as hard as any horse;
But he was absent, and his wandering eyes
Dropt from your honest look to seek the ground;
His shoulders caught a trick of stooping—so!
And when a lassie or a lad went wrong
His voice was not so loud in stern rebuke,
Among the gumlie Elders, as of old.

The pious reaper, Robin Anderson,
Seem'd also burthen'd with a bitter load;
Shame weigh'd upon him; once or twice, when vext
At trifles, he was plainly heard to swear;
And when the harvest store was gather'd in,
He came as from a funeral. The nights
Grew long and cold, and so the winter pass'd;
And in the middle winter came a cry
Which swept as crimson fire on Matthew's face—
That Maggie lived an evil life and sold
Body and soul for siller. When the news
One gusty gloaming reach'd the ingleside,
The Farmer fairly fell on Robin's breast,

And to the whistling of a winter wind
Scream'd Maggie's mother's name and moan'd aloud.

But ere the azure eyes of May, suffused
With dewy rapture, open'd to behold
A rainbow sowing flowers upon the spot
Where winter buried lay, old Matthew Bell
Forgot his shame and sorrow in a joy
Just on the edge of finish, like a kiss
That hangs divinely on a dewy lip,
Melting in incompletion. For the stars
Were smiling on the lap of Mistress Bell,
Who promised brawly to obey the text,—
"Be fruitful, multiply, replenish earth!"—
In decent manner. So indeed it was!
When May with neck as white as curds and cream
Peept blushing up 'mong roses white and red,
And when the laverock resting on her wrist
Went warbling up till it became a speck
Of sunshine (O the whisky!),—round the neck
Of cankerous Mistress Bell there hung a babe,
As plump as ever cuddled mother's breast,
A tiny stumpie-stowsie clutch'd with pride.

O Matthew's heart was high! his aged lungs
Were rax'd like chanticleer's! and in his joy
He could have hugg'd the Howdie, had she been
Less notable for snappishness and sneesh!
Great bliss he felt to have a son and heir,
To keep his mem'ry holy in the land
And multiply the siller. One there was
In all the farm who seem'd to welcome not
The little one—the gladness and the hope.
'Twas Robin Anderson. At twenty-eight,
Sly Robin was a man of pith and power,
Full six-feet high, with whiskers like a fox,
And eyes set deep 'neath mathematic brows.
And Robin ever loudly vow'd himself
(Though I, for one, knew better, as I said)
Above all corporal lusts and vanities:
He marry?—nay! to buy a kiss in Kirk,
Then strangle Freedom with an apron string,
And waste his substance on a noisy pack
Of tapsileeries ranged from big to small
Like polisht pots within a public-house!

And when his joy was fullest, Robin came

But little ben the farm ; and when in mirth
They brought the chittering infant to his seat
Beside the glowing kitchen fire, he gazed,
And snigger'd out a feeble idiot smile,
And with his great fore-finger touch'd the child
As one inspects a curious kind of fish,
Seem'd half afraid 'twould bite, and, sorely push'd,
Confess'd 'twas bonnie, with a long-drawn sigh,
As if the bonnieness was sad to see.
And ever after that, do all he could,
And clever tho' he was to act a part,
He never show'd a liking for the child;
Though what was stirring in his heart of hearts
The Father knew, He who for gracious ends
Decrees his children shall be fathers too.
He better could have dealt with one full-grown
Than with a fretful, feckless, restless thing
He lack'd the art to handle. So at last
He fairly threw aside the slippery sham,
And kept away as if the child had been
A biting cankerous cur. All this, be sure,
Pleased Matthew little, and the mother less,
And she grew high, and Matthew he grew stiff,

And both grew colder as the year wore on.

This bother'd Robin sore. He spake few words,
Toil'd stoutly, late and early, went to work,
Blacken'd in sanctity to the finger-tips,
And often rode to Edinglass to spend
Whole day with country cousins, as he said.
But oft, when none were near him, Robin heard,
A weakly moaning voice among the wheat;
A tearful sobbing, sobbing, fill'd his ear,
When mistily, sadly, fell the autumn rain;
And in his soul the image of a child
Battled with fiends. I plainly saw the man
Hated himself, and some cold snake that shed
Its slime upon his heart; and more than once
I made a guess, which after-days proved true.

Then once again came harvest, reapers reapt,
And all was rich and yellow with the grain.

O yellow, yellow waved the wealthy ears,
And yellow, yellow thro' the misty stalks
The sunshine drew its threads of liquid gold;

Hairst nodded, nodded, with a deep-drawn breath,
The sun-tann'd reapers reapt, the golden showers
Fell like a garment rustling to the knees
Of beauty, and from fence to fence the shout
Of reapers ran, and in among the sheaves
Bare-footed gleaners douk'd with brimming hands.
O yellow, yellow waved the wealthy ears!
But in a field half-reap'd, and brightly paved
With sparkling stubble, Robin work'd alone—
His colour'd handkerchief about his loins,
And on his head a broad-brimm'd hat of straw.

When sunny Noon was steaming, from the house
Came Mistress Bell, and in her hands the babe,
And down among the harvest-home she walk'd
Raising the little one to see the fields,
The reapers reaping, and the sun above;
And aye the mannock crow'd and waved his hands,
And blink'd his azure eyes against the sun,
And smiled and shone and leapt—for all the world,
Like a stray sunbeam flickering about
The mother's bosom. As the stars arranged,
Down to the very spot where Robin wrought,

Down-bending 'neath the yellow as she came,
Walk'd the goodwife—whom love, and joy, and pride
Of happy hairst, and fatness in the bud,
Made almost bonnie. In the neighbouring field
Just then arose a clamour as of men
In loud and fierce contention; half surprised,
Half curious, she placed the child with care
Upon a cosy heap of fallen wheat,
And hasten'd, fast as her old legs could run,
To gaze and question o'er the low green hedge.
As Fortune plann'd it, she had laid the bairn
Close to the spot where Robin bound the sheaves;
And peeping underneath the sheaves of wheat
The child (too wee to harbour malice!) saw
The reaper, laugh'd, and blink'd its azure eyes,
Stretch'd out its plump pink arms and cried aloud,
And would have tumbled from its yellow bed
Had Anderson not thrown his tools aside
And ran to help it. "Now," the reaper thought,
"I'll watch the child till Mistress Bell returns,
And this may help to heal the old offence!"
And while he thought, the mannikin lay still
Blinking full sage as if it knew the doubt

Of him, the gloomy man, whose hollow eyes
Lookt at it half afraid. With that the Lord
Bade His bright sunshine and His Harvest-home,
His merry sights and sounds, His happy light,
His peace and plenteousness of autumn gifts,
Mix with the smiling of the little child
And swim in vision on the reaper's heart.
A gush like mother's milk fill'd Robin's heart,
Warming that heart until it leapt for fun,
And with the harvest dazzling on his eyes
The reaper laugh'd aloud and colour'd red.
Still Mistress Bell stay'd cracking at the hedge
With one she knew, and part forgot her charge,
And part was dimly conscious it was safe.
Was Robin daft, or drunk, or both at once?
For with a wheaten straw of feathery end
He tickled, tantled, at the infant's throat,
And poked the honied dimples of its chin,
Until the child crow'd loud and kick'd and scream'd,
And flung its arms about, and jump'd for fun;
Till, fairly madden'd with a reckless glee,
This holy man, this clever clever chiel,
This big-boned reaper, Robin Anderson,

Caught up the wean, and tost it in the air,
And rock'd it in his arms and tousled it,
And not a mother in her teens could be
More glad, more tender. In the midst of all,
Back came the mistress : Robin saw her not;
But laugh'd, and tost the wean, and tousled it ;
Till suddenly he turn'd and caught her eye :
"What, *Robin!*"—and the reaper held the babe
Between his hands, blushing with heat and shame,
And eyed his little load with sheepish look
As doubting whether he should hold it fast,
Or let it tumble,—scraping with his feet ;
Till, gasping, gaping, like a startled hen,
She took the infant, gave him one long gaze,
And walkt away as stupified and dumb
As if the very Deil had stolen up
And wrought a miracle beneath her nose !

Hey ! Robin was as shamed as shamed could be,
And bound the sheaves all day, with gloomy eyes
That sought the ground. Then gloaming powder'd heaven
With stars that floated silver in the air,

And 'neath the stars Hairst sighing fell to sleep
With misty breath and audible golden wings,
And all the weary reapers reap'd no more.
Long time stay'd Robin in the dark without,
Grumbling, delaying, shamed, afraid to meet
The eyes of women in the farm within;
But partly hunger moved and partly pride,
And with a big defiant lounge he strode
Into the kitchen, where the labourers,
Women and men, with spoons of season'd wood,
Were dipping at the smoking porridge-bowl.
And there, between a strapping maiden's knees,
Was Master Matthew Bell, the son and heir!
No Mistress Bell was there; but when the child
Saw Robin Anderson, he crow'd aloud,
Kicking and laughing, tumbling on the knee,—
And Robin, ere he knew, was at his side,
Tickling and tousling him,—like one indeed
That partly sported to defy the voice
That said he could not sport, and casting round
His quick defiant glances now and then,
But with a secret tenderness of heart.
All stared—none spoke a word; but laughing eyes

Sparkled, and looks of wonder pass'd about,
While Robin's frenzy brighten'd, grew and grew,
Till the wee treble and the big haw, haw!
Like a grand giant and a wee wee gnome,
Rang merry, merry, merry!

After that,
No better friends could dwell in Christendie
Than Robin and the wean; and, stranger still,
After that night the art of pleasing it,
And holding it, and hushing it in arms,
Seem'd dull no longer, but so easy now,
That Robin wonder'd how he came to deem
Such things so hard to learn. The bridge once pass'd,
Pons Asinorum, as I said at school,
Robin cared little what he did or said.
Beneath the very eyes of Mistress Bell
And Matthew he would sport the child, and feel
As little shame as any new-yean'd lamb;
And Matthew and the Mistress they were pleased;
And the ice thaw'd, and so the time wore on
Till Hairst was shorn of every golden lock.

But ah! big Robin's heart was ill at ease:
The secret snake still nestled there, and soil'd
His very tongue with venom. Oftener,
He took his journeys into Edinglass;
At home, he only brighten'd when his friend
Was by to cheer him: then, and only then,
He sported; for on Sabbath he was first
At kirk, with gloomy face and soot-black gear.

But when the Hairst again had heavenward flown,
An angel leaving gentle gifts behind,
The child of Matthew's age fell sick, and all
Was silence in the farm. Then doctors came
And whisper'd learnëd difference to the ticks
Of learnëd watches; and a yaumer weak
Was heard throughout the night. Matthew was mad,
And Mistress Bell all tears; but none paid heed
To Robin,—who would sit beside the fire,
Glower at the coal, and heark with hungry ear
To those that tiptoe stole about the house
And whisper'd. Once, on silent shoeless feet,
He crept into the little sleeping room,
And saw the pale, pale babe on mother's lap:

He look'd and could not speak—a scalding heat
Grew in his throat—he stammer'd, blush'd, and stared;
But when he turn'd away his face was white
With ghastly pain more terrible than tears.
What felt he, thought he? Is it fair to guess?
Perchance his thought was something like to this:
"If wedded, I had such another child
As lies before me, and the child should die
For lack of such a love as I could give,
Would all the gold and silver in the world
Wipe from my soul that piteous baby-face?
Would twenty thousand prayers, pray'd day and night,
Drown in the hearing of the Lord my God
The cry my babe had utter'd as it died?"

And when the little one was fall'n asleep,
Drest in its Sabbath clothes of white to keep
Eternities of Sabbath in the grave,
Old Matthew, groaning, stump'd about the house,
Sour Elder though he was; and Mistress Bell
Wept low and bitter, with an eldritch grief,
To which the woman's quaint uncomely face
Gave double solemnness;—for aye she kiss'd

The frosty lips, and aye with tender care
Sorted the clothes upon the white, white limbs,
To make them look the sweeter, weeping sore.
But in the silent hush of noon, one crept
On tiptoe to the chamber where the child
Lay, tiny, breathless,—like a lily flower
Under the thinly dropping misty dews
Of gloaming, making where it lay in shade
A faint and glow-worm glamour of its own.

'Twas Robin; and he touch'd the tiny hands,
And look'd upon the baby face that Death
Had fill'd with shadows ancient as the leaves
That shaded Adam's garden; and he gazed
As one fresh-landed after years at sea
Might gaze upon a flower reminding him
Of meadows where he gamboll'd when a boy.

He shed no tears. Around his eyes there swam
Two dewy rings, the mist of tears unshed,
And in a dream, he heark'd, and seem'd to hear
An infant cry from far away, and see
Two hands uplifted from beneath his knees

To draw him down and kiss him on the mouth ;
And so he crept away, unseen, unheard,
Hating the silence of the mourning house,
Longing to break the silence with a shriek.

Seven days the child had slumber'd under grass,
And now the snow was falling in a mist
And sowing snow-drops on the little grave,
When Robin rode away to Edinglass
On business of his own. Four days he stay'd ;
And Matthew, in his sorrow, scarce took heed.

But standing at the threshold of the farm,
One morning, Matthew saw a farmer's gig,
Drawn by a piebald pony of his own,
Come trotting up the road ; and in it sat
A woman and a man. Up came the gig,
And halted at the farm ; and with a cry
Of wonder, even fear, the farmer saw
That he who drove was Robin Anderson,
And she that sat beside him—with a child
Tuck'd softly underneath her Paisley shawl—
His sinful daughter, Maggie. Both were pale,

And dropt their eyes; but Robin's teeth were set
Together. Not a word could Matthew speak,
But Robin help'd the lassie to the ground,
And led her to the door; and Matthew Bell
Gave way, walk'd ben and backwards, stared and gasp'd,
"What's this? What's this? And is it daft ye are?
And have you both forgotten?" and his eyes
Glitter'd on Maggie with a ghastly pain;
But Robin took him by the shoulder-blade,
And push'd him ben the kitchen. "Wheesht a while!"
Said Robin; "wheesht a while, and hear me out:
May Clootie grip me, Matthew, I have been
A hypocrite and villain,—both in kirk
And here, as friend and servant, in the farm.
'Twas me brought Meg to sorrow and to shame—
But here I stand—to take the shame myself—
And Meg's my wife!" The Farmer stared and gasp'd,
Clutch'd at the empty air with eager hand,
And spoke not. "Father!" Maggie moan'd aloud;
At that, he eyed her with a hungry look,
As he would wither her, and answer'd nought.
Then Robin said, "I take the shame myself,—
And Meg's my honest wife; and if your heart

Is shut against us both, the world is wide,
And we can go away, and we can work;
But if you care or sorrow for the lamb
You late have laid beneath the kirkyard sod,
Forgive poor Maggie for the bairnie's sake:—
Come, here am I, to take the shame myself,
And Meg's my wife!" Then Maggie cried again,
"Father!"—and as she spake drew back her shawl,
And show'd her child asleep upon her breast,
A picture of the other child asleep,
And as she spake, it waken'd, gave a cry,
And kick'd to run upon its rosy feet.

Then, some say Matthew thought him of a slip
Himself had made when he was warm and young;
Some that he knew full well 'twould cost him dear
To part with Robin; others, that the wean,
When Maggie set him down, ran toddling o'er,
Peep'd in the Farmer's face, and laugh'd for fun,
Pull'd at his watch-chain boldly with a cry,
And did it all. But when the Farmer's wife
Came creeping to the kitchen, with a scream
Saw Maggie, lifted up her hands and groan'd,

Old Matthew sharply turn'd and cut her short,
And never looking at poor Maggie's face,
Bade Robin seat himself and talk it o'er.

That's all, sir!—for a child might guess the rest;
Matthew came round, and Mistress Bell was forced
To give a doubtful nod,—and all was done.
Robin had saved and scraped; he bought a piece
Of Matthew's land, where Maggie and her boy
Were settled down for good. That tale was false
Of Maggie's evil life in Edinglass!
But, sir, it is a truth that Robin's heart,
In spite of all the cunning of his head,
Gushing the milk of human kindness up,
Drown'd the wee deil, Hypocrisy, therein;
That Robin's comely wife and Mistress Bell
Meet every Sabbath, dying to be friends,
And quarrel every Sabbath day for good.
But ah! to see the dreadful change that years
Have wrought in Robin! He is well-to-do,
Has other weans beside the elbow-slip,—
That's nothing singular!—But, sir, he's fat!
He has been known to go to sleep in kirk!

And oft, within this very parlour here,
Twould give your heart a thrill to hear him sing
"Corn Rigs," or "Tullochgorum!"

Such a change
Can stolen sweets and fleshly vanities,
Children and women, work in holy men,
E'en clever lads like Robin! . . Well, I've done—
No more, unless you wish to see me fu':
I've far to walk,—and 'tis the Sabbath day.

THE GREEN GNOME.

A MELODY.

RING, sing! ring, sing! pleasant Sabbath bells!
Chime, rhyme! chime, rhyme! thorough dales and dells!
Rhyme, ring! chime, sing! pleasant Sabbath bells!
Chime, sing! rhyme, ring! over fields and fells!

And I gallop'd and I gallop'd on my palfrey white as milk,
My robe was of the sea-green woof, my serk was of the silk;
My hair was golden yellow, and it floated to my shoe,
My eyes were like two harebells bathed in little drops of
dew;
My palfrey, never stopping, made a music sweetly blent
With the leaves of autumn dropping all around me as I
went;

And I heard the bells, grown fainter, far behind me peal
and play,
Fainter, fainter, fainter, fainter, till they seem'd to die
away;
And beside a silver runnel, on a little heap of sand,
I saw the green Gnome sitting, with his cheek upon his
hand;
Then he started up to see me, and he ran with cry and
bound,
And drew me from my palfrey white, and set me on the
ground:
O crimson, crimson, were his locks, his face was green to
see,
But he cried, "O light-hair'd lassie, you are bound to
marry me!"
He claspt me round the middle small, he kissed me on
the cheek,
He kissed me once, he kissed me twice—I could not stir
or speak;
He kissed me twice, he kissed me thrice—but when he
kissed again,
I called aloud upon the name of Him who died for
men!

Ring, sing! ring, sing; pleasant Sabbath bells!
Chime, rhyme! chime, rhyme! thorough dales and dells!
Rhyme, ring! chime, sing! pleasant Sabbath bells!
Chime, sing! rhyme, ring! over fields and fells!

O faintly, faintly, faintly, calling men and maids to pray,
So faintly, faintly, faintly, rang the bells afar away;
And as I named the Blessed Name, as in our need we can,
The ugly green green Gnome became a tall and comely man!
His hands were white, his beard was gold, his eyes were black as sloes,
His tunic was of scarlet woof, and silken were his hose;
A pensive light from Faëryland still linger'd on his cheek,
His voice was like the running brook, when he began to speak:
"O you have cast away the charm my step-dame put on me,
Seven years I dwelt in Faëryland, and you have set me free!
O I will mount thy palfrey white, and ride to kirk with thee,
And by those little dewy eyes, we twain will wedded be!"

Back we gallop'd, never stopping, he before and I behind,
And the autumn leaves were dropping, red and yellow, in the wind,
And the sun was shining clearer, and my heart was high and proud,
As nearer, nearer, nearer, rang the kirk-bells sweet and loud,
And we saw the kirk before us, as we trotted down the fells,
And nearer, clearer, o'er us, rang the welcome of the bells!

Ring, sing! ring, sing! pleasant Sabbath bells!
Chime, rhyme! chime, rhyme! thorough dales and dells!
Rhyme, ring! chime, sing! pleasant Sabbath bells!
Chime, sing! rhyme, ring! over fields and fells!

HUGH SUTHERLAND'S PANSIES.

The aged Minister of Inverburn,
A mild heart hidden under features stern,
Leans in the sunshine on the garden-pale,
Pensive, yet happy, as he tells this tale,—
And he who listens sees the garden lie
Blue as a little patch of fallen sky.

"The lily minds me of a maiden brow,"
Hugh Sutherland would say; "the marigold
Is full and sunny like her yellow hair,
The full-blown rose her lips with sweetness tipt;
But if you seek a likeness to her eye—
Go to the pansy, friend, and find it there!"
"Ay, leeze me on the pansies!" Hugh would say—
Hugh Sutherland, the weaver—he who dwelt
Here in the white-wash'd cot you fancy so—
Who knew the learnëd names of all the flowers,

And recognised the lily, tho' its head
Rose in a ditch of dull Latinity!

Pansies? You praise the ones that grow to-day
Here in the garden: had you seen the place
When Sutherland was living! Here they grew,
From blue to deeper blue, in midst of each
A golden dazzle like a glimmering star,
Each broader, bigger, than a silver crown;
While here the weaver sat, his labour done,
Watching his azure pets and rearing them,
Until they seem'd to know his step and touch,
And stir beneath his smile like living things!
The very sunshine loved them, and would lie
Here happy, coming early, lingering late,
Because they were so fair.

Hugh Sutherland
Was country-bred—I knew him from the time
When on a bed of pain he lost a limb,
And rose at last, a lame and sickly lad,
Apprenticed to the loom—a peevish lad,
Mooning among the shadows by himself.

Among these shadows, with the privilege
Of one who loved his flock, I sought him out,
And gently as I could I won his heart;
And then, tho' he was young and I was old,
We soon grew friends. He told his griefs to me,
His joys, his troubles, and I help'd him on;
Yet sought in vain to drive away the cloud
Deep pain had left upon his sickly cheek,
And lure him from the shades that deepen'd it.
Then Heaven took the task upon itself
And sent an angel down among the flowers!
Almost before I knew the work was done,
I found him settled in this but and ben,
Where, with an eye that brighten'd, he had found
The sunshine loved his garden, and begun
To rear his pansies.

Sutherland was poor,
Rude, and untutor'd; peevish, too, when first
The angel in his garden found him out;
But pansy-growing made his heart within
Blow fresh and fragrant. When he came to share
This cottage with a brother of the craft,

Only some poor and sickly bunches bloom'd,
Vagrant, though fair, among the garden-plots;
And idly, carelessly, he water'd these,
Spread them and train'd them, till they grew and grew
In size and beauty, and the angel thrust
Its bright arms upward thro' the bright'ning sod,
And clung around the sickly gardener's heart.
Then Sutherland grew calmer, and the cloud
Was fading from his face. Well, by-and-by,
The country people saw and praised the flowers,
And what at first had been an idle joy
Became a sober serious work for fame.
Next, being won to send a bunch for show,
He won a prize—a sixth or seventh rate,
And slowly gath'ring courage, rested not
Till he had won the highest prize of all.
Here in the sunshine and the shade he toil'd
Early and late in joy, and, by-and-by,
Rose high in fame; for not a botanist,
A lover of the flowers, poor man or rich,
Came to the village, but the people said
"Go down the lane to Weaver Sutherland's,
And see his pansies!"

Thus the summers pass'd,
And Sutherland grew gentler, happier;
The angel God had sent him clung to him:
There grew a rapturous sadness in his tone
When he was gladdest, like the dewiness
That moistens pansies when they bloom the best;
And in his face there dawn'd a gentle light
Like that which softly clings about a flow'r,
And makes you love it. Yet his heart was glad,
More for the pansies' sakes than for his own:
His eye was like a father's, moist and bright,
When they were praised; and, as I said, they seem'd
To make themselves as beauteous as they could,
Smiling to please him. Blessings on the flowers!
They were his children! Father never loved
His little darlings more, or for their sakes
Fretted so dumbly! Father never bent
More tenderly above his little ones,
In the still watches of the night, when sleep
Breathes balm upon their eyelids! Night and day
Poor Hugh was careful for the gentle things
Whose presence brought a sunshine to the place
Where sickness dwelt: this one was weak and small,

And needed watching like a sickly child;
This one so beauteous, that it shamed its mates
And made him angry with its beauteousness.
"I cannot rest!" cried Hughie with a smile,
"I scarcely snatch a moment to myself—
They plague me so!" Part fun, part earnest, this:
He loved the pansies better than he knew.
Ev'n in the shadow of his weaving room
They haunted him and brighten'd on his soul:
Daily while busy working at the loom
The humming-humming seem'd a melody
To which the pansies sweetly grew and grew—
A leaf unrolling soft to every note,
A change of colours with the change of sound
And walking to the door to rest himself,
Still with the humming-humming in his ears,
He saw the flowers and heard a melody
They made in growing. Pleasure such as this,
So exquisite, so lonely, might have pass'd
Into the shadowy restlessness of yore;
But wholesome human contact saved him here,
And kept him fresh and meek. The people came
To stir him with their praise, and he would show

The medals and the prizes he had got—
As proud and happy as a child who gains
A prize in school.

The angel still remain'd
In winter, when the garden-plots were bare,
And deep winds piloted the shriven snow:
He saw its gleaming in the cottage fire,
While, with a book of botany on his knee,
He sat and hunger'd for the breath of spring.
The angel of the flowers was with him still!
Here beds of roses sweeten'd all the page;
Here lilies whiter than the falling snow
Crept gleaming softly from the printed lines;
Here dewy violets sparkled till the book
Dazzled his eyes with rays of misty blue;
And here, amid a page of Latin names,
All the sweet Scottish flowers together grew
With fragrance of the summer.

Hugh and I
Were still fast friends, and still I help'd him on;
And often in the pleasant summer-time,

The service over, on the Sabbath day,
I join'd him in the garden, where we sat
And chatted in the sun. But all at once
It came upon me that the gardener's hand
Had grown less diligent; for tho' 'twas June
The garden that had been the village pride
Look'd but the shadow of its former self;
And ere a week was out I saw in church
Two samples fairer far than any blown
In Hughie's garden—blooming brighter far
In sweeter soil. What wonder that a man,
Loving the pansies as the weaver did—
A skilful judge, moreover—should admire
Sweet Mary Moffat's sparkling pansy-eyes?

The truth was out. The weaver play'd the game
(I christen'd it in sport that very day)
Of "Love among the Pansies!" As he spoke,
Telling me all, I saw upon his face
The peevish cloud that it had worn in youth;
I cheer'd him as I could, and bade him hope:
"You both are poor, but, Sutherland, God's flowers
Are poor as well!" He brighten'd as I spoke,

And answer'd, "It is settled! I have kept
The secret till the last, lest 'nay' should come
And spoil it all; but 'ay' has come instead,
And all the help we wait for is your own!"

Even here, I think, his angel clung to him.
The fairies of his garden haunted him
With similes and sympathies that made
His likes and dislikes, though he knew it not.
Beauty he loved if it was meek and mild,
And like his pansies tender ev'n to tears;
And so he chose a maiden pure and low,
Who, like his garden pets, had love to spare,
Sunshine to cast upon his pallid cheek,
And yet a tender clinging thing, too weak
To bloom uncared for and unsmiled upon.

Soon Sutherland and she he loved were one,—
And bonnily a moon of honey gleam'd
At night among the flowers! Amid the spring
That follow'd, blossom'd with the other buds
A tiny maiden with her mother's eyes.
The little garden was itself again,

The sunshine sparkled on the azure beds;
The angel Heaven had sent to save a soul
Stole from the blooms and took an infant shape
And wild with pleasure, seeing how the flowers
Had given her their choicest lights and shades,
The father bore his baby to the font
And had her christen'd PANSY.

After that,
Poor Hugh was happy as the days were long,
Divided in his cares for all his pets,
And proudest of the one he loved the best.
The summer found him merry as a king,
Dancing the little one upon his knee
Here in the garden, while the plots around
Gleam'd in the sun, and seem'd as glad as he.

But moons of honey wane, and summer suns
Of wedlock set to bring the autumn in!
Hugh Sutherland, with wife and child to feed,
Wrought sore to gain his pittance in a world
His pansies made so fair. Came Poverty
With haggard eyes to dwell within the house;

When first she saw the garden she was glad,
And, seated on the threshold, smiled and span.
But times grew harder, bread was scarce as gold,
A shadow fell on Pansy and the flowers;
And when the strife was sorest, Hugh received
An office—lighter work and higher pay—
To take a foreman's place in Edinglass.
'Twas hard, 'twas hard, to leave the little place
He loved so dearly; but the weaver look'd
At Mary, saw the sorrow in her face,
And gave consent,—happy at heart to think
His dear ones would not want. To Edinglass
They went, and settled. Thro' the winter hours
Bravely the weaver toil'd; his wife and child
Were happy, he was heartsome—tho' his taste
Was grassy lowlands and the caller air.

The cottage here remain'd untenanted,
The angel of the flowers forsook the place,
The sunshine faded, and the pansies died.

Two summers pass'd; and still in Edinglass
The weaver toil'd, and ever when I went

Into the city, to his house I hied—
A welcome guest. Now first, I saw a change
Had come to Sutherland : for he was pale
And peevish, had a venom on his tongue,
And hung the under-lip like one that doubts.
Part of the truth I heard, and part I saw—
But knew too late, when all the ill was done !
At first, poor Hugh had shrunk from making friends,
And pored among his books of botany,
And later, in the dull dark nights he sat,
A dismal book upon his knee, and read :
A book no longer full of leaves and flowers,
That glimmer'd on the soul's sweet consciousness,
Yet seem'd to fill the eye,—a dismal book,—
Big-sounding Latin, English dull and dark,
And not a breath of summer in it all.
The sunshine perish'd in the city's smoke,
The pansies grew no more to comfort him,
And he began to spend his nights with those
Who waste their substance in the public-house :
The flowers had lent a sparkle to his talk,
Which pleased the muddled wits of idle men ;
Sought after, treated, liked by one and all,

He took to drinking; and at last lay down
Stupid and senseless on a rainy night,
And ere he waken'd caught the flaming fire,
Which gleams to white-heat on the face and burns
Clear crimson in the lungs.

But it was long,
Ere any knew poor Hughie's plight; and, ere
He saw his danger, on the mother's breast
Lay Pansy withering—tho' the dewy breath
Of spring was floating like a misty rain
Down from the mountains. Then the tiny flower
Folded its leaves in silence, and the sleep
That dwells in winter on the pansy-beds
Fell on the weaver's house. At that sad hour
I enter'd, scarcely welcomed with a word
Of greeting: by the hearth the woman sat
Weeping full sore, her apron o'er a face
Haggard with midnight watching, while the man
Cover'd his bloodshot eyes and cursed himself.
Then leaning o'er, my hand on his, I said—
"She could not bear the smoke of cities, Hugh!
God to His Garden has transplanted her,

Where summer dwells for ever and the air
Is fresh and pure!" But Hughie did not speak;
I saw full plainly that he blamed himself;
And ere the day was out he bent above
His little sleeping flower, and wept, and said
"Ay, sir! she wither'd, wither'd like the rest,
Neglected!" and I saw his heart was full.
When Pansy slept beneath the churchyard grass
Poor Hughie's angel had return'd to Heaven,
And all his heart was dark. His ways grew strange
Peevish, and sullen; often he would sit
And drink alone; the wife and he grew cold,
And harsh to one another; till at last
A stern physician put an end to all,
And told him he must die.

No bitter cry,
No sound of wailing rose within the house
After the Doctor spoke, but Mary mourn'd
In silence, Hughie smoked his pipe and set
His teeth together, at the ingleside.
Days pass'd; the only token of a change
Was Hughie's face—the peevish cloud of care

Seem'd melting to a tender gentleness.
After a time, the wife forgot her grief,
Or could at times forget it, in the care
Her husband's sickness brought. I went to them
As often as I could, for Sutherland
Was dear to me, and dearer for his sin.
Weak as he was he did his best to toil,
But it was weary work! By slow degrees,
When May was breathing on the sickly bunch
Of mignonette upon the window-sill,
I saw his smile was softly wearing round
To what it used to be, when here he sat
Rearing his flowers; altho' his brow at times
Grew cloudy, and he gnaw'd his under lip.
At last I found him seated by the hearth,
Trying to read: I led his mind to themes
Of old langsyne, and saw his eyes grow dim:
"O sir," he cried, "I cannot, cannot rest!
Something I long for, and I know not what,
Torments me night and day!" I saw it all,
And sparkling with the brilliance of the thought,
Look'd in his eyes and caught his hand, and cried
"Hugh, it's the pansies! Spring has come again,

The sunshine breathes its gold upon the air
And threads it through the petals of the flowers,
Yet here you linger in the dark!" I ceased
And watch'd him. Then he trembled as he said,
"I see it now, for as I read the book
The lines and words, the Latin seem'd to bud,
And they peep'd thro'." He smiled, like one ashamed,
Adding in a low voice, "I long to see
The pansies ere I die!"

What heart of stone
Could throb on coldly, Sir, at words like those?
Not mine, not mine! Within a week poor Hugh
Had left the smoke of Edinglass behind,
And felt the wind that runs along the lanes,
Spreading a carpet of the grass and flowers
For June the sunny-hair'd to walk upon.
In the old cottage here he dwelt again.
The place was wilder than it once had been,
But buds were blowing green around about,
And with the glad return of Sutherland
The angel of the flowers came back again.
The end was near and Hugh was wearied out,

And like a flower was closing up his leaves
Under the dropping of the gloaming dews.

And daily, in the summer afternoon,
I found him seated on the threshold there,
Watching his flowers, and all the place, I thought,
Brighten'd when he was nigh. Now first I talk'd
Of heavenly hopes unto him, and I knew
The angel help'd me. On the day he died
The pain had put its shadow on his face,
And words of doubt were on his tremulous lips:
"Ah, Hughie, life is easy!" I exclaim'd,
"Easier, better, than we know ourselves:
'Tis pansy-growing on a mighty scale,
And God above us is the gardener.
The fairest win the prizes, that is just,
But all the flowers are dear to God the Lord:
The Gardener loves them all, He loves them all!"
He saw the sunshine on the pansy-beds
And brighten'd. Then by slow degrees he grew
Cheerful and meek as dying man could be,
And as I spoke there came from far-away
The faint sweet melody of Sabbath bells.

And "Hugh," I said, "if God the Gardener
Neglected those he rears as you have done
Your pansies and your Pansy, it were ill
For we who blossom in His garden. Night
And morning He is busy at His work.
He smiles to give us sunshine, and we live :
He stoops to pluck us softly, and our hearts
Tremble to see the darkness, knowing not
It is the shadow He, in stooping, casts.
He pluckt your Pansy so, and it was well.
But, Hugh, though some be beautiful and grand,
Some sickly, like yourself, and mean and poor,
He loves them all, the Gardener loves them all!"
Then later, when no longer he could sit
Out on the threshold, and the end was near,
We set a plate of pansies by his bed
To cheer him. "He is coming near," I said,
"Great is the garden, but the Gardener
Is coming to the corner where you bloom
So sickly!" And he smiled, and moan'd, "I hear!"
And sank upon his pillow wearily.
His hollow eyes no longer bore the light,
The darkness gather'd round him as I said,

"The Gardener is standing at your side,
His shade is on you and you cannot see:
O Lord, that lovest both the strong and weak,
Pluck him and wear him!" Even as I pray'd,
I felt the shadow there and hid my face;
But when I look'd again the flower was pluck'd,
The shadow gone: the sunshine thro' the blind
Gleam'd faintly, and the widow'd woman wept.

THE LEGEND OF THE STEPMOTHER.

I.

As I lay asleep, as I lay asleep,
Under the grass as I lay so deep,
As I lay asleep in my cotton serk
Under the shade of Our Lady's Kirk,
I waken'd up in the dead of night,
I waken'd up in my death-serk white,
And I heard a cry from far away,
And I knew the voice of my daughter May:
"Mother, mother, come hither to me!
Mother, mother, come hither and see!
Mother, mother, mother dear,
Another mother is sitting here:
My body is bruised, and in pain I cry,
On straw in the dark afraid I lie,

I thirst and hunger for drink and meat,
And mother, mother, to sleep were sweet!"
I heard the cry, though my grave was deep,
And awoke from sleep, and awoke from sleep.

II.

I awoke from sleep, I awoke from sleep,
Up I rose from my grave so deep!
The earth was black, but overhead
The stars were yellow, the moon was red;
And I walk'd along all white and thin,
And lifted the latch and enter'd in,
And reach'd the chamber as dark as night,
And though it was dark my face was white:
"Mother, mother, I look on thee!
Mother, mother, you frighten me!
For your cheeks are thin and your hair is grey!"
But I smiled, and kiss'd her fears away,
I smooth'd her hair and I sang a song,
And on my knee I rock'd her long:
"O mother, mother, sing low to me—
I am sleepy now, and I cannot see!"

I kiss'd her, but I could not weep,
And she went to sleep, she went to sleep.

III.

As we lay asleep, as we lay asleep,
My May and I, in our grave so deep,
As we lay asleep in the midnight mirk,
Under the shade of our Lady's Kirk,
I waken'd up in the dead of night,
Though May my daughter lay warm and white,
And I heard the cry of a little one,
And I knew 'twas the voice of Hugh my son:
"Mother, mother, come hither to me!
Mother, mother, come hither and see!
Mother, mother, mother dear,
Another mother is sitting here:
My body is bruised and my heart is sad,
But I speak my mind and call them bad;
I thirst and hunger night and day,
And were I strong I would fly away!"
I heard the cry, though my grave was deep,
And awoke from sleep, and awoke from sleep!

IV.

I awoke from sleep, I awoke from sleep,
Up I rose from my grave so deep,
The earth was black, but overhead
The stars were yellow, the moon was red;
And I walk'd along all white and thin,
And lifted the latch and enter'd in.
"Mother, mother, and art thou here?
I know your face, and I feel no fear;
Raise me, mother, and kiss my cheek,
For oh I am weary and sore and weak."
I smooth'd his hair with a mother's joy,
And he laugh'd aloud, my own brave boy;
I raised and held him on my breast,
Sang him a song, and bade him rest.
"Mother, mother, sing low to me—
I am sleepy now and I cannot see!"
I kiss'd him, and I could not weep,
As he went to sleep, as he went to sleep.

V.

As I lay asleep, as I lay asleep,
With my girl and boy in my grave so deep,

As I lay asleep, I awoke in fear,
Awoke, but awoke not my children dear,
And heard a cry so low and weak
From a tiny voice that could not speak;
I heard the cry of a little one,
My bairn that could neither talk nor run,
My little, little one, uncaress'd,
Starving for lack of the milk of the breast;
And I rose from sleep and enter'd in,
And found my little one pinch'd and thin,
And croon'd a song and hush'd its moan,
And put its lips to my white breast-bone;
And the red, red moon that lit the place
Went white to look at the little face,
And I kiss'd and kiss'd, and I could not weep,
As it went to sleep, as it went to sleep.

VI.

As it lay asleep, as it lay asleep,
I set it down in the darkness deep,
Smooth'd its limbs and laid it out,
And drew the curtains around about;

Then into the dark, dark room I hied
Where he lay awake at the woman's side,
And though the chamber was black as night,
He saw my face, for it was so white;
I gazed in his eyes, and he shriek'd in pain,
And I knew he would never sleep again,
And back to my grave went silently,
And soon my baby was brought to me;
My son and daughter beside me rest,
My little baby is on my breast;
Our bed is warm and our grave is deep,
But he cannot sleep, he cannot sleep!

THE WIDOW MYSIE.

AN IDYL OF LOVE AND WHISKY.



Tom Love, a man "prepared for friend or foe,
Whisker'd, well-featured, tight from top to toe."

O WIDOW MYSIE, smiling, soft, and sweet!
O Mysie, buxom as a sheaf of wheat!
O Mysie, Widow Mysie, late Monroe,
Foul fall the traitor-face that served me so!
O Mysie Love, a second time a bride,
I pity him who tosses at your side—
Who took, by honied smiles and speech misled,
A beauteous bush of brambles to his bed!

You saw her at the ploughing match, you ken,
Ogling the whisky and the handsome men:
The smiling woman in the Paisley shawl,
Plump as a partridge, and as broad as tall,

With ribbons, bows, and jewels fair to see,
Bursting to blossom like an apple-tree,
And every ribbon, bow, and jewel fine
Perfumed like apple blossoms dipt in wine.
Ay, that was Mysie,—now two score and ten,
Now Madam Love of Bungo in the Glen!
Ay, that was Mysie, tho' her looks no more
Dazzle with beams of brightness as of yore!—
The tiny imps that nested in her eyes,
Winning alike the wanton and the wise,
Have ta'en the flame that made my heart forlorn
Back to the nameless place where they were born.

O years roll on, and fair things fade and pine!—
Twelve sowings since and I was twenty-nine:
With ploughman's coat on back, and plough in hand,
I wrought at Bungo on my father's land,
And all the neighbour-lassies, stale or fair,
Tried hard to net my father's son and heir.
My heart was lightsome, cares I had but few,
I climb'd the mountains, drank the mountain dew.
Could sit a mare as mettlesome as fire,
Could put the stone with any in the shire,

Had been to college, and had learn'd to dance,
Could blether thro' my nose like folks in France,
And stood erect, prepared for friend or foe,
Whisker'd, well-featured, tight from top to toe.

"A marriageable man, for every claim
Of lawful wedlock fitted," you exclaim?
But, sir, of all that men enjoy or treasure,
Wedlock, I fancied, was the driest pleasure.
True ; seated at some pretty peasant's side,
Under the slanted sheaves I loved to hide,
Lilting the burthen of a Scottish tune,
To sit, and kiss perchance, and watch the moon,
Pillow'd on breasts like beds of lilies white
Heaving and falling in the pale moonlight ;
But rather would have sat with crimson face
Upon the cutty-stool with Jean or Grace,
Than buy in kirk a partner with the power
To turn the mountain dew of Freedom sour.

I loved a comely face, as I have said,
But sharply watch'd the maids who wish'd to wed,-
I knew their arts, was not so cheaply won,

They loved my father's Siller, not his Son.
Still, laughing in my sleeve, I here and there
Took liberties allow'd my father's heir,
Stole kisses from the comeliest of the crew,
And smiled upon the virgin nettles too.
So might the game have daunder'd on till this,
And lasted till my father went to bliss,—
But Widow Mysie came, as sly as sin,
And settled in the "William Wallace" Inn.

The Inn had gone to rack and loss complete
Since Simpson drown'd himself in whisky neat;
And poor Jock Watt who follow'd in his shoes,
Back'd by the sourest, gumliest of shrews,
(The whisky vile, the water never hot,
The very sugar sour'd by Mistress Watt,)
Had found the gossips, grumbling, groaning, stray
To Sandie Kirkson's, half a mile away.
But hey! at Widow Mysie's rosy face,
A change came o'er the spirits of the place,
The fire blazed high, the shining pewter smiled,
The glasses glitter'd bright, the water boil'd,
Grand was the whisky, Highland born and fine,

And Mysie, Widow Mysie, was divine!

O sweet was Widow Mysie, sweet and sleek!
The peach's blush and down were on her cheek,
And there were dimples in her tender chin
For Cupids small to hunt for kisses in;
Dark-glossy were her ringlets, each a prize,
And wicked, wicked were her beaded eyes;
Plump was her figure, rounded and complete,
And tender were her tiny tinkling feet!
All this was nothing to the warmth and light
That seem'd to hover o'er her day and night;—
Where'er she moved, she seem'd to soothe and please
With pleasant murmurs as of humble-bees;
Her small plump hands on public missions flew
Like snow-white doves that flying croon and coo;
Her feet fell patter, cheep, like little mice;
Her breath was soft with sugar and with spice;
And when her finger—so!—your hand would press,
You tingled to the toes with loveliness,
While her dark eyes, with lessening zone in zone,
Flasht sunlight on the mirrors of your own,
Dazzling your spirit with a wicked sense

That seem'd more innocent than innocence!

Sure one so beauteous and so sweet had graced
And cheer'd the scene, where'er by Fortune placed;
But with a background of the pewter bright,
Whereon the fire cast gleams of rosy light,
With jingling glasses round her, and a scent
Of spice and lemon-peel where'er she went,
What wonder she should to the cronies seem
An angel in a cloud of toddy steam?
What wonder, while I sipt my glass one day,
She, and the whisky, stole my heart away?

She was not loath!—for, while her comely face
Shone full on other haunters of the place,
From me she turn'd her head and peep'd full sly
With just the corner of her roguish eye,
And blush'd so bright my toddy seem'd to glow
Beneath the rosy blush and sweeter grow;
And once, at my request, she took a sip,
And sweeten'd all the liquor with her lip.
"Take heed! for Widow Mysie's game is plain,"
The gossips cried, but warn'd me all in vain:

Like sugar melting at the toddy's kiss,
My very caution was dissolved in bliss,
Fear died for ever with a mocking laugh,
And Mysie's kisses made his epitaph.

Kisses ? Ay, faith, they follow'd score on score,
After the first I stole behind the door,
And linger'd softly on these lips of mine
Like Massic whisky drunk by bards divine.
But O ! the glow, the rapture, and the glee,
That night she let me draw her on my knee—
When bliss thrill'd from her to my finger-tips,
Then eddied wildly to my burning lips,
From which she drank it back with kisses fain,
Then blush'd and glow'd and breathed it back again—
Till, madden'd with the ecstasy divine,
I clasp'd her close and craved her to be mine,
And thrilling, panting, struggling up to fly,
She breathed a spicy "Yes" with glistening eye,
And while my veins grew bright, my heart went wild,
Fell like a sunbeam on my heart, and smiled !

The deed thus done, I hied me home, you say,

And rued my folly when I woke next day?
Nay! all my business was to crave and cry
That Heaven would haste the holy knot to tie,
Though "Mysie lass," I said, "my gold and gear
Are small, and will be small for many a year,
Since father is but fifty years and three,
And tough as cobbler's wax, though spare and wee!"
"Ah, Tam," she sigh'd, "there's nothing there to rue—
The gold, the gear, that Mysie wants is you!"
And brightly clad, with kisses thrilling through me,
Clung like a branch of trembling blossoms to me.

I found my father making up his books,
With yellow eyes and penny-hunting looks.
"Father," I said, "I'm sick of single life,
And will, if you are willing, take a wife."
"Humph," snapt my father, "(six and four are ten,
And ten are twenty)—Marry? who? and when?"
"Mistress Monroe," I said, "that keeps the inn."
At that he shrugg'd his shoulders with a grin:
"I guess'd as much! the tale has gone the round!
Ye might have stay'd till I was underground!
But please yourself—I've nothing to refuse,

Choose where you will—you're old enough to choose;
But mind," he added, blinking yellow eye,
"I'll handle my own guineas till I die!
Frankly I own, you might have chosen worse,
Since you have little siller in your purse—
The Inn is thriving, if report be true,
And Widow Mysie has enough for two!"

"And if we wait till he has gone his way,
Why, Mysie, I'll be bald, and you'll be gray,"
I said to Mysie, laughing at her side.
"Oh, let him keep his riches," she replied,
"He's right! there's plenty here for you and I!
May he live long; and happy may he die!"
"O Mysie, you're an angel," I return'd,
With eye that glisten'd dewily and yearn'd.
Then running off she mix'd, with tender glee,
A glass of comfort—sat her on my knee—
"Come, Tam!" she cried, "who cares a fig for wealth—
Ay, let him keep it all, and here's his health!"
And added, shining brightly on my breast,
"Ah, Tam, the siller's worthless—Love is best!"

O Widow Mysie, wert thou first sincere,
When tender accents trembled on mine ear,
Like bees that o'er a flower will float and fleet,
And ere they light make murmurs soft and sweet?
Or was the light that render'd me unwise,
Guile's—the sweet Quaker with the downcast eyes?
O Widow Mysie, not at once are we
Taught the false scripture of Hypocrisy;
Even pink Selfishness has times, I know,
When thro' his fat a patriot's feelings glow;
Falsehood first learns her nature with a sigh,
And nurses bitterly her first-born Lie.

Days pass'd; and I began, to my amaze,
To see a colder light in Mysie's gaze;
Once when, with arm about her softly wound,
I snatch'd a kiss, she snapt and flusht and frown'd;
But oftener her face a shadow wore,
Such as had never darken'd it before;
I spoke of this, I begg'd her to explain,—
She tapt my cheek, and smiled, and mused again.
But, in the middle of my love-alarm,
The Leech's watch went "tick" at Bungo Farm;

My father sicken'd, and his features cold
Retain'd the hue, without the gleam, of gold.

Then Mysie soften'd, sadden'd, and would speak
Of father's sickness with a dewy cheek;
When to the Inn I wander'd, unto me,
Lightly, as if she walk'd on wool, came she,
And "Is he better?" "Is he changed at all?"
And "Heaven help him!" tenderly would call.
"So old—so ill—untended and alone!
He is your father, Tom,—and seems my own!"
And musing stood, one little hand of snow
Nestling and fluttering on my shoulder—so!
But father sicken'd on, and then one night,
When we were sitting in the ingle-light,
"O Tom," she cried, "I have it!—I should ne'er
Forgive myself for staying idly here,
While he, your father, lack'd in his distress
The love, the care, a daughter's hands possess—
He knows our troth—he will not say me nay;
But let me nurse him as a daughter may,
And he may live, for darker cases mend,
To bless us and to join us in the end!"

"But, Mysie——" "Not a word, the thing is plann'd,"
She said, and stopt my mouth with warm white hand.
She went with gentle eyes that very night,
Stole to the chamber like a moonbeam white;
My father scowl'd at first, but soon was won—
The keep was carried, and the deed was done

O Heaven! in what strange Enchanter's den,
Learnt she the spells wherewith she conquer'd men?
When to that chamber she had won her way,
The old man's cheek grew brighter every day;
She smooth'd the pillows underneath his head,
She brought sweet music roundabout his bed,
She made the very mustard-blisters glow
With fire as soft as youthful lovers know,
The very physic bottles lost their gloom
And seem'd like little fairies in the room,
The very physic, charm'd by her, grew fine,
Rhubarb was nectar, castor-oil was wine.
Half darkly, dimly, yet with secret flame
That titillated up and down his frame,
The grim old man lay still, with hungry eye
Watching her thro' the room on tiptoe fly;—

She turn'd her back—his cheek grew dull and dim!
She turn'd her face—its sunshine fell on him!
Better and better every day grew he,
Colder and colder grew his nurse to me,
Till up he leapt, with fresher life astir,
And only sank again—to kneel to her.

"Mysie!" I cried, with flushing face, too late
Stung by the pois'nous things whose names I hate,
Which in so many household fires flit free,
The salamanders, Doubt and Jealousy,—
"Mysie!"—and then, in accents fierce and bold,
Demanded why her looks had grown so cold?
She trembled, flush'd, a tear was in her eye,
She dropt her gaze, and heaved a balmy sigh,
Then spoke with tender pauses low and sad:
Had I a heart? I frankly own'd I had.
Could I without a conscience-qualm behold
My white-hair'd father, weak, untended, old,
Who had so very short a time to live,
Reft of the peace a woman's hands can give?
"Mysie!" I shriek'd, with heart that seem'd to rend,
With glaring eyes, and every hair on end,

Clasping her little hands, "O Tam," she cried,
"But for my help your father would have died;
Bliss ? to have saved your filial heart that sorrow!
But for my help, why, he may die to-morrow.
Go, Tom!—this weak warm heart I cannot trust
To utter more—be generous! be just!
I long have felt—I say it in humility—
A sort of—kind of—incompatibility!
Go, Tam! Be happy! Bless you! Wed another!—
Ah, I shall ever love you!—as a mother!"

Sir, so it was. Stunn'd, thunder-stricken, wild,
I raved, while father trembled, Mysie smiled;
O'er all the country-side the scandal rang,
And ere I knew, the bells began to clang;—
And shutting eyes and stopping ears, as red
As ricks on fire, I blushing turn'd and fled.
Twelve years have pass'd since I escaped the net,
And father, tough as leather, lingers yet,
A grey mare rules, the laugh has come to me,
I sport, and thank my stars that I am free!
If Mysie likes her bargain ill or well,
Only the Deil, who won it her, can tell;

But she, who could so well his arts pursue,
May learn a trick to cheat her Teacher too.

VILLAGE VOICES.

I.

JANUARY WIND.

I.

The wind, wife, the wind ; how it blows, how it blows ;
It grips the latch, it shakes the house, it whistles, it screams, it crows,
It dashes on the window-pane, then rushes off with a cry,
Ye scarce can hear your own loud voice, it clatters so loud and high ;
And far away upon the sea it floats with thunder-call,
The wind, wife, the wind, wife ; the wind that did it all !

II.

The wind, wife, the wind ; how it blew, how it blew ;
The very night our boy was born, it whistled, it scream'd, it crew ;

And while you moan'd upon your bed, and your heart
was dark with fright,
I swear it mingled with the soul of the boy you bore that
night;
It scarcely seems a winter since, and the wind is with us
still,—
The wind, wife; the wind, wife; the wind that blew us ill!

The wind, wife, the wind; how it blows, how it blows!
It changes, shifts, without a cause, it ceases, it comes and

And David ever was the same, wayward, and wild, and
bold—
For wilful lad will have his way, and the wind no hand
can hold;
But ah! the wind, the changeful wind, was more in the
blame than he;
The wind, wife; the wind, wife, that blew him out to sea!

IV.

The wind, wife, the wind; now 'tis still, now 'tis still;
And as we sit I seem to feel the silence shiver and thrill,

'Twas thus the night he went away, and we sat in silence
here,
We listen'd to our beating hearts, and all was weary and
drear;
We long'd to hear the wind again, and to hold our David's
hand—
The wind, wife; the wind, wife, that blew him out from
land!

V.

The wind, wife, the wind; up again, up again!
It blew our David round the world, yet shriek'd at our
window-pane;
And ever since that time, old wife, in rain, and in sun,
and in snow,
Whether I work or weary here, I hear it whistle and
blow,
It moans around, it groans around, it wanders with
scream and cry—
The wind, wife; the wind, wife; may it blow him home
to die!

II.

APRIL RAIN.

I.

SHOWERS, showers, nought but showers, and it wants a
 week of May,
Flowers, flowers, summer flowers, are hid in the green and
 the grey;
Green buds and grey shoots cover their sparkling gear,
They stir beneath, they long to burst, for the May is so
 near, so near,—
While I spin and I spin, and the fingers of the Rain
Fall patter, pitter, patter, on the pane.

II.

Showers, showers, silver showers, murmur and softly sing,
Flowers, flowers, summer flowers, are swelling and heark-
 ening;
It wants a week of May, when John and I will be one,

The flowers will burst, the birds will sing, as we walk to
church in the sun,
So patter goes my heart, in a kind of pleasant pain,
To the patter, pitter, patter of the Rain.

III.

SUMMER MOON.

I.

SUMMER Moon, O Summer Moon, across the west you fly,
You gaze on half the earth at once with sweet and steadfast eye;
Summer Moon, O Summer Moon, were I aloft with thee,
I know that I could look upon my boy who sails at sea.

II.

Summer Moon, O Summer Moon, you throw your silver showers
Upon a glassy sea that lies round shores of fruit and flowers,
And on the blue tide's silver edge drop blossoms in the breeze,
And the shadow of the ship lies dark near shades of orange-trees.

III.

Summer Moon, O Summer Moon, now wind and storm
have fled,
Your light creeps thro' a cabin-pane and lights a flaxen
head:
He tosses with his lips apart, lies smiling in your gleam,
For underneath his folded lids you put a gentle dream.

IV.

Summer Moon, O Summer Moon, his head is on his arm,
He stirs with balmy breath and sees the moonlight on the
Farm,
He stirs and breathes his mother's name, he smiles and
sees once more
The Moon above, the fields below, the shadow at the door.

Summer Moon, O Summer Moon, across the lift you go,
Far south you gaze and see my Boy, where groves of
orange grow!
Summer Moon, O Summer Moon, you turn again to me,
And seem to have the smile of him who sleeps upon the
sea.

IV.

DECEMBER SNOW.

I.

The cold, cold snow! the snow that lies so white!
The moon and stars are hidden, there is neither warmth
nor light—
I wonder, wife—I wonder, wife—where Jeanie lies this
night?

II.

'Tis cold, cold, cold, since Jeanie went away,
The world has changed, I sit and wait, and listen night
and day,
The house is silent, silent, and my hair has grown so grey—
'Tis cold, cold, cold, wife, since Jeanie went away.

III.

And tick! tick! tick! the clock goes evermore,
It chills me, wife—it seems to keep our child beyond the
door;

I watch the firelight shadows as they float upon the floor,
And tick! tick! tick! wife, the clock goes evermore!

IV.

'Tis cold, cold, cold!—'twere better she were dead,
Not that I heed the Minister, and the bitter things he
said,—
But to think my lassie cannot find a place to lay her
head—
'Tis cold, cold, cold, wife—better she were dead!

V.

The cold, cold snow! the snow that lies so white!
Beneath the snow her little one is hidden out of sight,
But up above, the wind blows keen, there's neither warmth
nor light,
I wonder, wife—I wonder, wife—where Jeanie lies this
night!

JUVENILIA.

(ÆT. 18—19.)

ὄσσιος ἀπ' εὐνᾶς ἂν·

CLOUDLAND.

UNDER green branches I lie,
Pensive, I know not why;
And far above me, in skies
As clear as an infant's eyes,
Slowly and silently, one by one,
The vaporous clouds sail by.

For the branches, that, here and there,
Grow yellow in autumn air,
Are parted; and through the rents
Of a moveless, umbrosial tent,
The visible concave round of the sky
Shows blue, and quiet, and fair.

Face upward, calmly I rest
As the leaf that lies dead on my breast;
And the only sound I hear
Is a rivulet tinkling near,
And falling asleep in the odorous heart
O' the wood, like a bird in a nest.

My mood would be dreamily wise
As a hermit's low-lidded eyes,
And I should idle away
The end of the autumn day,
Save for the vaporous shapes that glide
Light-piloted through the skies!

I close my eyes in vain,
In a pensive, poetic pain:
Even then, to the gurgling glee
Of the brook I cannot see,
Slowly and silently glide the clouds
O'er the dreamy blank of my brain!

With a motion wind-bequeath'd,
Fantastically wreathed,

They disturb my soul,—as the beat
Of the pale moon's silver feet
Troubled the dumb green sea to its depths,
Till it audibly stirr'd and breathed.

White as a flock of sheep,
Slender and soft as sleep,
With a radiance mild and faint
As the smile of a pictured saint,
Or the beautiful light from mother's eyes
On the face of a babe asleep!

Yonder with dripping hair,
Is Aphrodite the fair,
Fresh from the foam, whose dress
Enfleeces her loveliness,
And melts away from the sun-kiss'd limbs
That are reddening unaware.

One like a Titan cold,
With banner about him roll'd,
Bereft of sense, and hurl'd
To the wondrous underworld,

And hugely floating, unsinew'd, down
Some miraculous river old.

One like a bank of snows,
Which flushes to crimson, and glows;
One like a lady tall
In a violet robe; and all
Have a motion that seems not motion,
But only disturb'd repose;—

Motion such as you see
In the pictured divinity
By the soul of an artist thrown
On a Naiad sculptured in stone,
For ever and ever about to blush
With a frighten'd cry, and flee!

Beautiful, stately, slow,
The pageants changefully grow;
And in my bewilder'd brain
Comes the distinct refrain
Of the mighty music and stately speech
Of songs made long ago.

Ay, into my heart there throng
Rich melodies worshipp'd long:
The epic of Troy divine,
Milton's majestical line,
The palfrey pace and the glittering grace
Of Spenser's magical song.

Do whatever I may,
I cannot shake them away;
They are haunting voices that move
Like the wondrous shapes above;
Stately and slow they come and they go,
Like measured words when we pray.

When the troublous motion sublime
Of the clouds and the answering rhyme,
Ceasing, leave now and again
A pause in the hush'd heart, then
The voice of the rivulet bursteth in
With a gurgling lyrical chime.

O sweet, very sweet, to lie,
Pensive, I know not why,

And to fashion magical swarms
Of poet-created forms
In the wonderful pageants that come and go
Above in a windless sky.

For yonder a dark ship furls
Sails by an island of pearls,
And crafty Ulysses steers
Through the white-tooth'd waves, and hears
The liquid song of the syren throng,
That beckon through golden curls.

'Tis faded away, and lo!
The Grecian tents, like snow,
And a brazen Troy afar,
Whence Helen shines like a star;
And—see!—the tents dissolve to reveal
The glittering Greeks below!

In fierce, precipitate haste
From a golden gate are chased
A shadowy Adam and Eve;
And within the gate they leave,

A sunbeam burns like the angel's sword,
  And illumines the skyey waste.

  The sunbeam fading, behold
  A huge tree tipp'd with gold,
  And a naked Eve beneath,
  With the apple raised to her teeth;
While round and round the tremulous coils
  Of a glistening snake are roll'd.

  But oppress'd with pensive fears,
  Trembling with unshed tears,
  I droop my eyes, until
  The notes of the lyrical rill
Are shaken like dew on my closèd eyes,
  And another pageant appears.

  Far, far away, snow-white,
  Full of a silvern light,
  Beauteous, and yet so small,
  They are scarce perceived at all,
Is Una, leading her lamb by the side
  Of the mounted Red-Cross Knight.

Then, to meet a fair foe, speeds
The knight over azure meads,
While threatening dragons, hordes
Of satyrs, and traitor swords,
Assail the path of the lonely maid,
But are awed by the lamb she leads!

And she wanders undismay'd
Through vistas of sun and shade;
Over a mountain's brow
She glides like a moon; and now
She is fading away in the emerald depths
Of a mimical forest glade,—

Which, opening flower-like, shows
A garden of crimson repose,
Of lawns ambrosial,
Streams that flash as they fall,
And in the centre a golden bower,
Like the yellow core of a rose.

On the verge of this fairy land
Doth mailèd Sir Guyon stand,

And bending his bloody plume
Under portals of snowy bloom,
He enters in like a sombre shade,
Breathless, and sword in hand.

Oh ! is it not sweet, sweet, sweet,
To lie in this green retreat,
In a beautiful dim half-dream
Like a god on a hill, and seem
A vital part of the pageant grand,
And the brooklet's melody sweet !

But shadows lengthen around,
And the dew is dim on the ground ;
And hush'd, to list to the tune
Of the coming stars and moon,
The rivulet glides through the heart o' the wood,
With cooler, quieter sound.

Homeward ;—but when the pale
Moon filleth her silver sail,
I shall sit alone with a book
'Neath another heaven, and look

On the spiritual glamour and cloudy march
Of Milton's majestical tale;

Or wander, side by side
With Una, through forests wide,
Watching her beauty increase
To heavenly patience and peace,
While the snow-white lamb licks her snow-white hand,
And looks up in her face, meek-eyed!

Or, 'mid trumpets murmuring loud,
The waving of banners proud,
And the rattle of horses' hooves,
See the Grecian host, as it moves
In a vaporous mist to a fated Troy,
That dissolves away like a Cloud.

PASTORAL PICTURES.



I.

THE RIVER.

How merry a life the little river leads,
Piping a vagrant ditty free from care;
Now singing as it rustles through the reeds
And broad-leaved lilies sailing here and there,
Now lying level with the clover meads
And musing in a mist of silver air!
Bearing a sense of peace where'er it goes,
Narrow'd to mirth or broaden'd to repose:
Through copsy villages and tiny towns,
By belts of woodland singing sweet,
Pausing where sun and shadow meet
Without the darkness of the downs,
Bickering o'er the keystone as it flows
'Neath mossy bridges arch'd like maiden feet.

Run seaward, for I follow!
Let me cross
My garden-threshold ankle-deep in moss.
Sweet stream, your heart is beating and I hear it,
As conscious of its pleasure as a girl's:
O little river, whom I love so well,
Is it with something of a human spirit
You twine those lilies in your sedgy curls?
Take up the inner voice we both inherit,
O little river of my love, and tell!

The rain has crawled from yonder mountain-side,
And passing, left its footprints far and wide.
The path I follow winds by cliff and scar,
Purple and dark and trodden as I pass,
Save where the primrose lifts its yellow star
Set like a gem in scanty braids of grass—
The primrose in its crevice damp and dun,
Second to light its censer at the sun!
Dwarf birches show their sodden roots and shake
Their melting jewels on my bending brows,
The mottled mavis pipes among their boughs
For joy of five unborn in yonder brake.

The river, narrow'd to a woody glen,
Leaps trembling o'er a little rocky ledge
Then broadens forward into calm again
Where the gray moor-hen builds her nest of sedge;
Caught in the dark those willow-trees have made,
Kissing the yellow lilies o'er and o'er,
It flutters twenty feet along the shade,
Halts at the boulder like a thing afraid,
And turns to kiss the lilies yet once more.

Those little falls are lurid with the rain
That ere the day is done will come again.
The river falters swoll'n and brown,
Falters, falters, as it nears them,
Shuddering back as if it fears them,
Falters, falters, falters, falters,
Then dizzily rushes down.

But all is calm again, the little river
Smiles on and sings the song it sings for ever.
Here at the curve it passes tilth and farm,
And faintly flowing onward to the mill
It stretches out a little azure arm

To aid the miller, aiding with a will,
And singing, singing still.
Sweet household sounds come sudden on mine ear:
The waggons rumbling in the hoof-plod lanes,
The village clock and trumpet Chanticleer,
The flocks and lowing steers on neighbouring
plains,
With shouts of urchins ringing loud and clear;
And lo! a village, breathing breath that curls
In foamy wreaths through ancient sycamores,
Sending a hum of looms through cottage doors.
I stumble on a group of market girls
Barefooted in the deep and dewy grass;
Small urchins rush from sanded kitchen-floors
To stare with mouths and glances as I pass.

But yonder cottage where the woodbine grows,
Half cottage and half inn, a pretty place,
Tempts ramblers with the country cheer it shows;
Entering, I rob the threshold with a rose,
And meet the welcome on a mother's face.
Come, let me sit. The scent of garden flowers
Flits through the casement of the sanded room,

Hitting the sense with thoughts of summer hours
When half the world has burgeon'd into bloom.
Is that the faded picture of our host
Shading the plate of pansies where I sit—
That lean-limb'd stripling straighter than a post,
Clad in a coat that seems a sorry fit?
I drink his health in this his own October,
That bites so sharply on the thirsty tongue;
And here he comes, but not so slim and sober
As in the days when Love and he were young.
"Hostess!" I fill again and pledge the glory
Of that stout angel answering to my call,
Who changed him from the shadow on the wall
Into the rosy tun of sack before me!

Again I follow where the river wanders.
The landscape billows into hills of thyme,
Up to whose purple summits larkspurs climb;
Till in a glen of birchen-trees and boulders
I halt, beneath a heathery mountain ridge
Clothed on with amber cloud from head to shoulders.

I wander on and gain a little bridge,

And watch the angling of a shepherd boy;
Below the little river glimmers by,
Touched with a troubled sense of pain or joy
By some new life at work in earth and sky.
The pastures there steam mist from hidden springs,
Deep-hidden in the marsh the bittern calls,
And yonder swallow oils its ebon wings
While fluttering o'er the little waterfalls.
Below my feet the little budding flower
Thrusts up dark leaves to feel the coming shower:
I'll trust these weather-signs and creep apart
Beneath this crag until the rain depart,—
'Twill come again and go within an hour.
The moist soft wind has died and fallen now,
The air is hot and hush'd on flower and tree,
The leaves are troubled into sighs, and see!
There falls a heavy drop upon my brow.
The cloudy standard is above unfurl'd;
The aspen fingers of the blinded Rain
Feel for the summer eyelids of the world
That she may kiss them open once again.
Darker and darker, till with one accord
The clouds pour forth their hoard twice an hour,

A sunbeam rends their bowels like a sword
And frees the costly shower!

Fluttering around me and before me,
Stretched like a mantle o'er me,
The rushing shadows blind the earth and skies,
Dazzling a darkness on my gazing eyes
With troublous gleams of radiance, like the bright
Pigments of gold that flutter in our sight.
When with shut eyes we strain
Our aching vision back upon the brain.

Across the skies and o'er the plain
Fast fly the swollen shadows of the Rain;
Blown duskly on from hill to hill they fly,
O'er solitary streams and windy downs,
O'er little villages and darkened towns.

I crouch beneath the crag and watch the mist
Move on the skirts of yonder mountains gray,
Until it bubbles into amethyst
And softly melts away.
The thyme-bells catch their drops of silver dew,

And quake like fairies 'neath the sparkling load;
The squadron'd pines that shade the splashing road,
Are glimmering with a thousand jewels too.
And hark! the Angel of the Rain
Sings to the summer sleeping,
Pressing a dark damp face against the plain,
And pausing, pausing, not for pain,
Pausing, pausing, ere the low refrain,
Because she cannot sing for weeping.
She flings her cold dim arms about tho earth
That soon shall wear the blessing she has given,
Then brightens upward in a sunny mirth
And warbles back to heaven.

A fallen sunbeam trembles at my feet,
And as I sally forth the linnets frame
Their throats to answer yonder laverock sweet.
The jewell'd trees flash out in emerald flame;
The bright drops fall fulfilling peaceful sound,
And melt in circles on the shallow pools
That simmer on the red and sodden ground.
The rainbow issues from her cloudy shrine,
Trembling alone in heaven where she rules,

And arching down to kiss with kisses sweet
The little world that brightens at her feet,
Runs liquid through her many hues divine.

II.

IN THE MOUNTAINS.

The little river is the fittest singer
  To sound the praises of a day so fair.
The dews, suck'd up thro' pores of sunshine, linger
  As silver cloudlets in mid-air;
And over all the sunshine throws
Its golden glamour of repose.

Now suddenly, mine eyes perceive
  The purple hills that touch the sky,
And are familiar with the stars of eve;
  Against the pale blue west they lie,
Netted in mists of azure air,
With thread-like cataracts here and there.
O hark! O hark!
The shepherd shouts, and answering sheep-dogs bark;
And voices, startling Echo from her sleep,
Are blown from steep to steep.

At yonder falls, the trembling mountain lady
 Clings to the bramble high above me lying,
 With foamy veil behind her swift feet flying,
  And a lorn terror in her lifted voice,
Ere springing to the rush-friez'd basin shady,
  That boils below with noise.
Then, whirling dizzily for a moment's space,
She lets the sun make blushes on her face,
And lightly laughs at her own terror past,
And floateth onward fast.

The landscape darkens slowly
 With mountain shadow while I wander on;
 The tremulous gladness of the heart seems gone,
And a cool awe spreads round me, sweet and holy,—
A tender, sober-suited melancholy.
The path rough feet have made me winds away
O'er fenny meadows to the white highway,
 Where the big waggon clatters with its load,
And pushing onward, to the ankles wet
In swards as soft as silken sarcenet,
 I gain the dusty road.

The air is hotter here. The bee booms by
With honey-laden thigh,
Doubling the heat with sounds akin to heat;
And like a floating flower the butterfly
Swims upward, downward, till its feet
Cling to the hedgerows white and sweet.
A black duck rises clumsily with a cry,
And the dim lake is nigh.
The road curves upward to a dusty rise,
Where fall the sunbeams flake on flake;
And turning at the curve, mine eyes
Fall sudden on the silent lake,
Asleep 'neath hyacinthine skies.

The sunlight fades on mossy rocks,
And on the mountain-sides the flocks
Are spilt like streams;—the highway dips
Down, narrowing to a path where lambs
Lay to the udders of their dams
Their soft and pulpy lips.
The hills grow closer; to the right
The path sweeps round a shadowy bay,
Upon whose slated bottom, white

And crested waves faint-warbling play.
All else is still. But list, O list!
Hidden by boulders and by mist,
A shepherd whistles in his fist,
From height to height the far sheep bleat
In answering iteration sweet.

Along this rock I'll lie,
With face turned upward to the sky.
A dreamy numbness glows within my brain-
It is not joy and is not pain—
'Tis like the solemn, sweet imaginings
That cast a shade on music's golden wings.
With face turned upward to the sun,
I lie as indolent as one
Who, in a vision sweet, perceives
Angels thro' mists of lotus leaves;
And now and then small shadows move
Across me, cast by clouds so small
Mine eyes perceive them not at all
In the unsullied blue above.
I hear the streams that burst and fall,
The straggling shepherd's frequent call

The kine low bleating as they pass,
The dark lake stirring with the breeze,
The melancholy hum of bees,
The very murmur of the grass.

III.

SNOW.

I WANDER forth this chill December dawn:
Frost and his tiny elves are out, I see,
As busy as the fairy world can be,
Clothing a world asleep with fleecy lawn.
'Mid the blue silence of the evening hours
They glimmered duskly down from skyey bowers,
And featly have they laboured all night long,
Cheering their labour with a half-heard rhyme—
Low as the burthen of a shepherd's song
When Echo moans it over hills of thyme.

There is a hush of music on the air—
The white-wing'd fairies faltering everywhere;
And here and there,
Made by a sudden mingling as they fall,
There comes a softer lullaby than all,
Swept in upon the universal prayer.

Mine eyes and heart are troubled with a motion
Of music like the moving waves of ocean,
When, out of hearing, o'er the harbour bars
They sigh toward the moon and jasper stars.
The tiny squadrons waver down and thicken,
Gathering numbers as they fly,
And nearing earth their thick-set ranks they quicken,
And swim in swarms to die!

But now the clouds are winnowèd away:
The sky above is gray as glass; below
The feeble twilight of the dreamy day
Nets the long landskip hush'd beneath the snow.
The arrowy frosts sting keenly as I stray
Along the rutted lane or broad highway,
Past wind-swept hedges sighing sharp and clear,
Where half the sweetly changeful year
The scented summer loves to gleam and glow.
The new-lain snowy carpet, ankle-deep,
Crumbles beneath my footsteps as I pass,
Revealing scanty blades of frozen grass;
On either side the chirping sparrows leap,
And here and there a robin, friendly now,

From naked bough to bough.
That snow-clad homestead in the river's arm
Is haunted with the noisy rooks that fly
Between its bending beeches and the sky,
And hailing fast for yonder fallow farm,
A solitary linnet plunges by.
Light-muffled winds arising high among
White hills, deep brooding in their winter rest,
Bear from the eastern winter to the west
The muttered diapason of a song
Made by the thunder on a mountain's breast.

The sun is hanging in a purple globe,
'Mid yellow mists that stir with silver breath;
The little landskip slumbers, white as death,
Amid its naked fields and woody wolds,
Wearing the winter as a stainless robe,
Low trailing in a fall of fleecy folds.
By pasture-gates the mottled cattle swarm,
Thick'ning the misty air, with piteous eyes
Fixed ever on the tempest-breeding skies,
And watch the lingering traces of the storm
A feeble sunbeam kisses and illumes

Yon whitened spire that hints a hidden town,
And flickering for a space it darkens down
Above the silence of forgotten tombs.

I gain the shoulder of a plantain now,
A fledgling's flutter from a small hill's brow.
I see the hamlet, half a mile below,
With dripping gables and with darkened panes,
And watch the urchins in the narrow lanes
Below the school-house, shouting in the snow.
The whitened coach comes swiftly round the road
With horns to which a dozen hills reply,
And rattling onward with its laughing load,
Halts steaming at the little hostelry.
Hard by the lonely woodman pants and glows,
And wrapt in leather stockings to the thigh,
Toils with an icicle beneath his nose.
In yonder field an idle shepherd blows
His frozen fingers into tingling flame;
The gaunt old farmer, as he canters by,
Reins in to greet the country clowns by name;
That chestnut pony in the yellow fly
Draws the plump parson and his leaner dame.

I loiter down the road, and feel the ground
Like iron 'neath my heel; the windless air
Seems lying in a swound.
Frost follows in its path without a sound,
And plies his nimble fingers everywhere,
Under my eyelids and beneath my hair.
Yon mountain dons once more its helm of cloud,
The air grows dark and dim as if in wonder;
Once more the heaven is winnow'd, and the crowd
Of silken fairies flock with music under
A sky that flutters like a wind-swept shroud.

Through gloomy dimbles, clad with new-fall'n snow,
Back to my little cottage home I go.
But once again I roam by field and flood,
Stung into heat where hoar-frosts melt and bite,
What time the fog-wrapt sun drops red as blood,
And the white star is tingling into sight.

NOTE.

The preceding poems, both the Idyls and the Legends, are more or less dramatic—in so far as the writer in no instance speaks in his own person. This leads to a variety of style, which may or may not be a recommendation. All the scenes are Scottish; but the speakers, with one exception, are educated men, who, although they sometimes have recourse to Scottish phrases and idioms, do not habitually employ the vernacular. The Weaver, who tells the tale of "Poet Andrew," uses Scottish words liberally, but it has not always been thought necessary to represent his actual *pronunciation*. To print "auld" for "old," "cauld" for "cold," "o'" for "of," and the like, is to confuse, not vivify or verify, the text; and, indeed, the actual pronunciation is arbitrary and contradictory in the extreme. The author subjoins a brief glossary of the few words and phrases with which English readers can have any difficulty.

Aiblins, perhaps.
Bailie, a civic dignitary corresponding to the English alderman.
Bannock, a thick oaten cake.
Bield, small rustic building.
Biggin, ditto.
Birk, birch-tree.
Bonnet, a man's cap.
Breeks, breeches.
Brawly, finely, excellently.
But and ben, the front and back rooms of a house of two apartments.
Callant, lad.
Caller, fresh, cool.
Chittering, chattering as with cold.
Clishmaclaver, a tedious, fidgety person.
Clootie, Satanus.
Corn-craik, the bird known in England as the land-rail.
Cowrie, to stoop down.
Crack, to talk.
Daft, mad, silly.
Dee, to die.
Deil, devil.
Dominie, schoolmaster.
Doo, dove.
Douk, to dip down, as a bather in water.
Een, eyes.
Eldritch, weird.
Eerie, dismal.
Fash, to trouble.
Feckless, silly.
Flyte, to scold.

Fu', full, used in the sense of being full of liquor—intoxicated

Gowan, daisy.

Gloaming, twilight.

Gumlie, gloomy

Harrie, to rob

Hallanstone, threshold-stone.

Hairst, harvest.

Howdie, midwife.

Ilka, each.

Ken, know.

Keek, to peep.

Kirk, church.

Lyart, speckled black and white.

Laverock, lark.

Lear'less, unlearned.

Lum, chimney.

Mannock, little man.

Minnie, mother.

Mixtie-maxtie, confusedly mixed.

Muckle, much.

Old-farrant, old-fashioned.

Poortith, poverty.

Reek, smoke.

Sark, *serk*, shirt.

Sough, a word expressing the sound of the wind through trees.

Speir, to ask, inquire.

Sneesh, snuff.

Sweetie-shop, sweetmeat-shop.

Tocher, dowry.

Toyte, to rock from side to side.

Unco, very.

Wame, stomach

Wean, child.

Whiles, sometimes; *whiles*, *whiles*—sometimes, at others.

Whuzzle-whazzle, word expressing the sound of looms.

THE END.

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